On the waterfront

Why our ports and coastal communities hold the key to a more connected and prosperous Britain

KEY CITIES UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

MARCH 2025

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Cover and sections
360 Plymouth panorama, watercolour on Fabriano Artistico, © 2025 Simon Poulter. R&D project supported by i-DAT, University of Plymouth

A Key Cities report by the Key Cities Innovation Network, in association with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Key Cities.

Published by Document for the Key Cities Innovation Network

ISBN 978-0-9934156-7-8

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to keycities@salford.gov.uk

Produced by
Images&Co in partnership with ING Media

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Foreword from the Chair of Key Cities

Cllr John Merry CBE
Chair of Key Cities
Deputy City Mayor of Salford

Diversity is strength: that is certainly what we believe at Key Cities, the most geographically, demographically and environmentally diverse network of significant urbanised areas in the country.

Where our friends and partners at Core Cities often drive the policy agenda on agglomeration around regional economic capitals, our remit is to speak for the diversity of urban UK – and more than anything that means looking outside the charmed circle. It is here that growth must be unlocked if the Government is to achieve the national renewal it seeks.

Salford is not Manchester. Bradford is not Leeds. Coventry and Wolverhampton are not Birmingham. Bath is not Bristol. Sunderland is not Newcastle. But all these proud cities are second to none when it comes to spirit, ingenuity, heritage and identity. Our brief is often to speak for "the other" and for the need to make decisions at the level that matters to people and communities, not policymakers.

So it is with coastal communities. The nature of many of our member cities is that while they have urban centres, they are inextricably connected with their surrounding area – the peri-urban, the rural, the coastal. Around half our members have significant coastal areas and ports. Many more are closely linked through their work, travel and leisure connections.

To create a secure, successful and sustainable future for our island nation through defence, trade, renewable energy, climate resilience and social cohesion, we must turn the corner on half a century of still deepening decline.

At Key Cities we learn from each other, and there are insights in this report that are valuable to all places that seek to create successful and sustainable futures in the face of deep-rooted barriers and challenges.

The reality for many of our traditional communities on the coast is that older people are less well-served in health and care, younger people lack opportunities, and investment in their future is impeded by climate threats and outdated funding rules.

The coast can be a source of strength and inspiration underpinning our national renewal, but only if we confront its decline head on with a strategic approach to regeneration. This report offers a framework for doing so.

Foreword from the Lead on Ports and Coastal Communities

Cllr Tudor Evans OBE
Leader of Plymouth
City Council

I accepted the role of Key Cities Portfolio Holder for Ports and Coastal Communities because I felt that the long-term challenges faced by urban coastal communities, including high levels of deprivation, poor health outcomes, and the decline of traditional marine industries, have been largely overlooked.

The current ONS definition of coastal communities excludes many urban residents living near our coastline. Adopting a more inclusive definition would recognise approximately 5 million coastal residents, highlighting the true extent of coastal deprivation and underinvestment. Treasury rules often hinder regeneration efforts in these areas, as cost-benefit calculations focus on land value uplift, neglecting the costs of industrial contamination, crumbling infrastructure, and climate change impacts. The economic potential of our regional ports and their crucial role in achieving net zero targets through FLOW and more carbon-efficient freight movement are undervalued.

The report is divided into sections covering everything from the policy context, through economic stagnation, health, housing and educational deficits, community engagement, environmental stability and sustainable development. Evidence is presented that confirms higher rates of unemployment and economic inactivity, low wages as well as higher rates of preventable diseases and mental health issues. The report finds that coastal cities suffer from inadequate infrastructure, underfunded schools and that they are often at risk from floods and coastal erosion.

The report advocates for renewed focus and coherent strategies tailored to the unique needs of coastal communities, aimed at fostering economic resilience, social equity, and environmental stewardship. I fully endorse the recommendations it makes which are themed around empowerment, protection, connection, and investment as foundational strategies. I hope that it serves as a clarion call for our new Government to act swiftly. Communities without hope can, as we have seen all too recently, become fertile ground for extremism.

It is with pleasure then that I commend this Key Cities report, 'On the waterfront', as a comprehensive outline of the ongoing challenges faced by Britain's coastal communities. I extend my gratitude to the many stakeholders, community leaders, and local authority personnel who contributed their insights, especially Kasper de Graaf and the Key Cities Innovation Network members, whose efforts were instrumental in producing this report.

Summary

Following half a century of decline, Britain's traditional coastal communities are markedly disadvantaged compared to their inland counterparts, and the policy response from Government has been wholly inadequate.

Numerous reports by researchers, thinktanks, community organisations, parliamentary committees and the Government's own Chief Medical Officer have pointed to growing disparities in health outcomes, educational attainment, infrastructure, employment and climate risk, urging a range of social, economic and environmental measures to revitalise coastal communities and ports to create sustainable futures.

The Government elected in July 2024 is committed to tackling disadvantage but lacks a strategic focus on coastal decline. Coastal communities have every reason to be sceptical that politics can deliver and are vulnerable to the lure of simplistic solutions to complex problems, threatening social cohesion and political stability.

Building on the work of others over the last decade, on the experience of member authorities, research by member universities and perspectives from local stakeholders, this report calls on the Government to address this issue urgently with a coordinated approach based on 28 recommendations to empower, protect, connect and invest in communities which have too long been neglected, yet are central to our future.

POLICY

Protracted decline

The collapse of traditional industries like fishing, shipbuilding, and domestic tourism has left coastal towns struggling, with economic output 26% below national average and employment often low paid and insecure. People living on the coast are more exposed to preventable disease and mental health issues and have a lower life expectancy, many living in substandard housing with limited access to health services. Environmental risks including floods and coastal erosion threaten the sustainability of coastal communities.

Shortage of teachers and poor infrastructure contribute to

Lack of opportunity

low educational attainment, lack of opportunity and a brain drain of young people in search of better prospects. Policy interventions delivering short-term, uneven investment have not turned the tide of growing disparity, leading to growing calls for a long-term, strategic and coordinated response from Government.

Credibility gap

The new Government's stated priorities and actions to date are aligned with the needs of coastal communities but there is a substantial credibility gap that will hamper progress unless local communities have agency in a coordinated approach.

Member cities in the group agree their coastal areas are more disadvantaged in education, health, child poverty and skills. The skills gap between local residents and jobs created by inward investment reinforces a sense of alienation among locals who feel opportunities are not for them. There is a case for a targeted funding programme to improve educational outcomes in coastal areas.

Investment and data

Coastal cities have a key role in economic growth in areas including renewables and trade but investment is undermined by investment policies around Land Value Uplift and climate risk. Closer collaboration on data sharing and coordination between national and local government and universities could improve outcomes for coastal communities and ports.

RESEARCH

Deprivation

Many coastal cities experience relative deprivation with high rates of economic inactivity and personal insolvency. Crime rates are higher in medium to large coastal built-up areas. The new opportunities in renewable energy are limited for residents by low skill levels; increasing engineering and digital skills should be a priority.

Educational attainment

Educational attainment – undermined by poverty, intergenerational lack of educational capital and poor employment opportunities – is lower in coastal areas, with young people significantly less likely than elsewhere to enter higher education. Low-pay and insecure employment is widespread, exacerbating health inequality, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse.

Housing

Poor housing quality and a high proportion living in private rented accommodation further impact health and wellbeing, instability and social problems in certain areas.

Infrastructure

Many coastal cities face infrastructure deficiencies including poor transport and digital connectivity, inequities which are growing with advances in better connected areas.

Health outcomes

Health outcomes, including substance abuse, disease and mortality, are worse in coastal communities, yet they have significantly poorer provision and support in both primary and specialist care.

Climate change

Coastal cities are particularly vulnerable to environmental challenges such as climate change, rising sea levels and coastal erosion, impacting most medium, large and major built-up areas in coastal cities.

Universities driving innovation

Member universities of the Key Cities Innovation Network undertake wide-ranging research on the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental challenges facing Britain's coastal communities. The University of Southampton, Lancaster University, the Universities of East Anglia, Plymouth, Essex and Lincoln address diverse challenges from infrastructure solutions and place identity to climate resilience, coastal health and renewable energy to biodiversity. Working in concert with Eastern Arc, Coast-R and iPACT and other networks involving institutions and researchers all over the country, they strengthen the capacity of Key Cities for exploring locally effective, targeted interventions that are scalable across the wider network to reduce inequality and drive sustainable growth.

STAKEHOLDERS

Local engagement key to progress

The All-Party Parliamentary Group of MPs and Peers representing Key Cities met in Westminster to consider evidence presented by local stakeholders, including a GP, a service designer working with young ex-prisoners, a harbourmaster, a community arts festival director and the CEO of Britain's first National Marine Park. Their contributions highlighted the need to co-design services and solutions with local people, effective pathways for skills development, access to culture and reconnecting communities with their natural environment.

Evidence submitted later by University of Southampton researchers emphasised the importance of involving local stakeholders in sustainable development of port cities.

CONCLUSION

Framework for regeneration

Coastal cities and ports are engines of growth, and the coast has a major part to play in renewables, trade and environmental protection. But turning round half a century of decline means giving local communities agency in their future and a programme to empower, protect, connect and invest in them. The 28 recommendations in this report offer a framework for such a programme.

Recommendations

These recommendations flow from the work with member authorities, universities and stakeholders which is set out in this report.

In many cases, they also build on important work done previously by others and referenced here – including the New Economics Foundation (2016), the Social Market Foundation (2017 and 2019), the House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities (2019), the Chief Medical Officer's Report on Health in Coastal Communities (Whitty and Loveless, 2021), the Coastal Communities Alliance (Pragmatix, 2023), Onward (2023), the House of Lords Liaison Committee (2023), previous Key Cities reports Culture and Place in Britain (2023), Skills for Cities, Skills for Life (2023) and Civic Partners in Net Zero (2024), and the Key Cities Manifesto of March 2024.

What this highlights is that the critical issues identified here have not gone away and will not go away until expressly addressed by Government in a coherent strategy that sees and understands the consequences of the neglect from which our coastal communities have suffered for too long. The 28 recommendations listed here, to empower, protect, connect and invest in our coastal places, provide a foundation for Government, local authorities, universities and stakeholders to engage with communities in a coordinated, strategic approach to coastal regeneration.

Empower

Ensure that coastal communities are empowered and no longer marginalised, by:

1. Engaging with coastal communities to explore innovation in co-designing, co-creating and co-producing hyperlocal public services and place strategies for economic development and environmental protection.
2. Ensuring in devolution arrangements that decisions about skills provision and transport are made at the appropriate level to benefit coastal communities and in consultation with them.
3. Appointing a dedicated Minister for Coastal Communities to ensure coastal communities have a voice at the highest levels of government.

Protect

Ensure that coastal communities are protected from harm and disadvantage, by:

4. Coordinating policy and delivery across departmental responsibilities through a Cross-Departmental Task Force for coastal regions.
5. Planning and implementing coastal defences in light of changes in climate and environment.
6. Eliminating the disadvantages in health outcomes by the Department for Health and Social Care developing a national cross-government strategy on health and wellbeing of coastal communities in recognition of the unique challenges faced by these communities.
7. Taking account of geographical redistribution in planning ongoing medical training and education programmes to ensure coastal areas are not disadvantaged.
8. Improving capacity and responsiveness of hyperlocal community policing to address the higher crime rates experienced in coastal regions.

Connect

Create opportunities for our coastal communities to play their rightful part economically, culturally and socially by reconnecting them in the key areas of data, digital connectivity, transport and energy infrastructure:

9. Continuing to support research into all social, economic and environmental factors affecting coastal communities.
10. In official statistics and research studies, adopting a definition of coastal communities that encompasses and does not exclude urban coastal areas – and including where appropriate those coastal communities which have been displaced to make way for development and removed from their historical proximity to and identification with the sea.
11. Recognising and specifically addressing the high deprivation and poor health outcomes in coastal areas arising from historical underinvestment.
12. Exploring the potential for data collaboration across the Key Cities network through a data trust, focusing initially on local authorities and universities to build understanding how the benefits of data can be maximised.

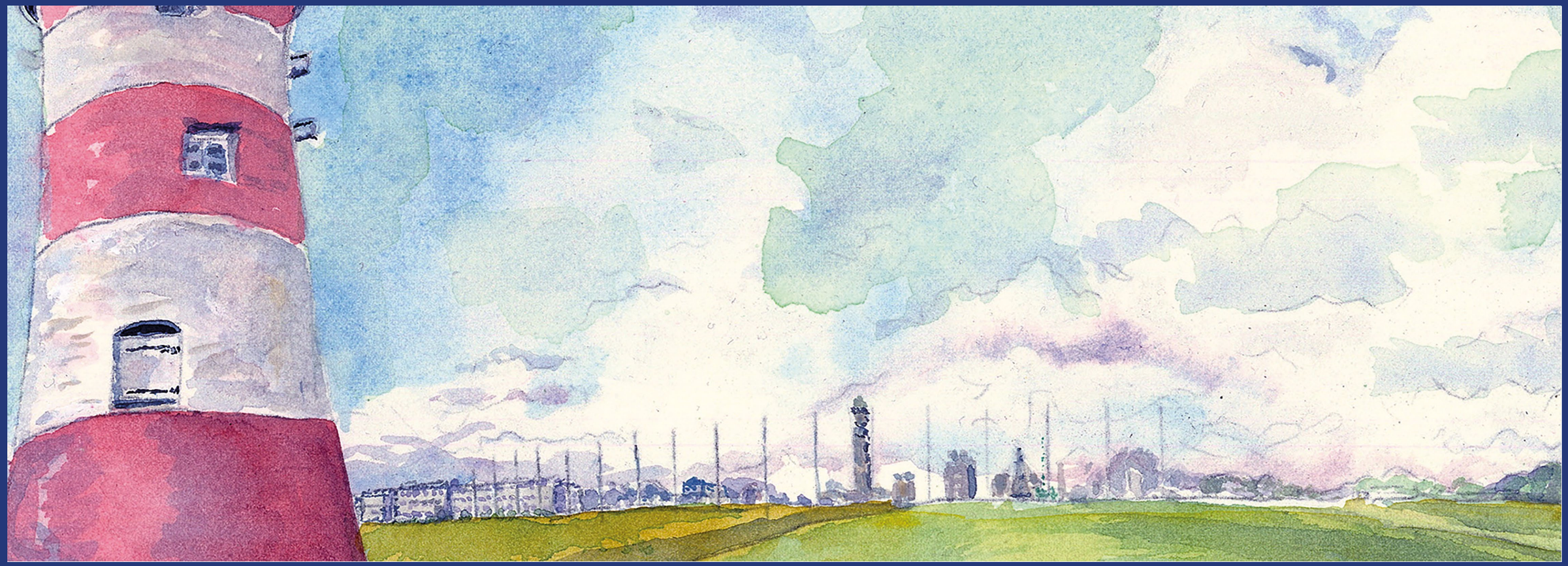
13. Prioritising delivery of 5G and Gigabit Broadband to remote coastal communities and addressing digital poverty to tackle exclusion, empower communities, stimulate innovation and break down barriers of opportunity.
14. Investing in better road, rail, and public transport links to reduce geographic isolation and improve access to jobs and services.
15. Promoting increased use where appropriate of sea transport, including short haul between British ports, as the most decarbonised form of transport.
16. Prioritising National Grid capacity and connection to coastal areas to optimise development of offshore renewable electricity generation.
17. Connecting young people with their environment and climate science by promoting and scaling up programmes such as the Morecambe Bay Curriculum, Stories in the Dust and Sea for Yourself.
18. Evaluating the availability, accessibility and impacts of cultural experience and engagement for coastal communities.

Invest

Reverse the decline and unlock the potential of our coastal communities, by:

19. Establishing long-term funding streams rather than relying on short-term, competitive grants to enable strategic development rather than piecemeal interventions.
20. Reviewing the adverse impact of HM Treasury's Green Book Land Value Uplift criteria with regard to coastal areas and other formulae used for funding allocation, to adequately reflect deprivation, disadvantage and opportunity.
21. Promoting policies to ensure fair wages and supporting local businesses in offering living wages.
22. Introducing targeted public funding to improve educational outcomes in coastal areas modelled on the education improvement programme launched in London in 2003.
23. Strengthening vocational education, improving skills training, and creating pathways to sustainable careers within coastal regions.
24. Expanding skills training and career pathways in growth industries such as renewable energy, digital services, and creative sectors.
25. Investing in coastal transformation by supporting the development of locally co-created place strategies including infrastructure development and support for local business.
26. Encouraging seaside towns to explore new sectors beyond tourism, such as creative industries, digital enterprises, and renewable energy.
27. Exploring models for stimulating development of creative industries corridors in remote coastal areas that lack current capacity but offer opportunity and potential.
28. Supporting small and medium local businesses by providing grants, mentorship, digital infrastructure, business hubs and enterprise zones to stimulate growth and innovation.

Policy



1 Policy review

Kasper de Graaf
Programme Director of the Key Cities APPG and Innovation Network

Before the Parliamentary election of July 2024, UK coastal communities faced decades of systemic challenges rooted in economic stagnation, health disparities, infrastructure deficits, educational decline, and environmental vulnerabilities.

Once thriving hubs of industry and tourism, these communities found themselves left behind by a slump in domestic seaside holidays, containerisation of sea transport, industrial decline, and globalisation – and then by national policy initiatives that were often fragmented, short-term, poorly targeted, and inadequately funded.

This overview explores the policy context leading up to the last election.

Economy and infrastructure

The collapse of traditional industries like fishing, shipbuilding, and domestic tourism left coastal towns struggling economically, with the gap in economic output between coastal communities and the rest of the country – already 23% by 1997 – widening to 26% in 2015, and 85% of workers on below average pay (Corfe, 2017).

In its 2016 report 'Turning Back to the Sea', the New Economics Foundation called for a "Blue New Deal" to revitalise coastal economies, with a range of proposals focused on empowering local communities, developing sustainable industries including renewables and fisheries, investing in infrastructure – from transport networks and broadband connectivity to flood defences – in order to support economic growth and community resilience, and planning for coastal erosion and climate change to ensure communities can adapt and thrive.

Three years later, the House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities (2019) echoed the call for improved transport connections amid a range of recommendations to tackle economic stagnation, including diversifying local economies to new sectors such as creative, digital and renewables, targeted support for local business, enhanced skills and education provision and pathways, and strategic, long-term public investment.

In its 2022 report on a range of key indicators, the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) further underscored the lack of enterprise growth, with job density and productivity significantly lagging behind inland areas.

Employment in coastal communities is characterised by high levels of low-paid, seasonal work. The 'Communities on the Edge' report commissioned by the Coastal Communities Alliance and Partners (Pragmatix Advisory, 2023) noted that nearly one in five jobs in these regions pay below the living wage. Insecure part-time employment in hospitality and social care sectors leaves residents economically vulnerable, reinforcing cycles of poverty and deprivation. To break these cycles, Pragmatix repeated the calls for long-term funding, improved provision for education and skills, and support for local business. It also emphasised the need for fair wage policies and support for local businesses in offering living wages to tackle deprivation and boost local economies.

Attempts to regenerate coastal areas have faced multiple systemic barriers, notably through application of the Treasury's Green Book tests. Whatever its merits in controlling public spending, the limitations of the Green Book are well known and not limited to coastal areas. Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham has frequently pointed to his experience as Chief Secretary to the Treasury in Gordon Brown's Government that nothing in the regions met the Green Book tests as they were set out. "The country was hardwired," he concluded in a Harvard University interview (2022), "to give more to the areas that already had most." But coastal cities and communities, crucial to driving equitable green growth, face a double jeopardy: lack of capacity to build on and half the hinterland to sell to. This calculation resulted in a vicious circle of inadequate infrastructure undermining the case for inward commercial investment.

It is an approach that undervalues coastal regeneration and – in Burnham's terminology – hardwires continuing decline.

Health inequalities

Coastal communities suffer from disproportionately poor health outcomes. Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty's report on health in coastal communities (Whitty and Loveless, 2021) identified a significant "coastal health deficit", with residents experiencing higher rates of preventable diseases, mental health issues, and lower life expectancy compared to inland populations. For instance, coastal residents were 15% more likely to die early from preventable causes, with coronary heart disease rates particularly high in regions like Yorkshire.

Factors contributing to these health disparities include ageing and substandard housing stock, such as poorly maintained Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs), which exacerbate both physical and mental health conditions. Limited access to healthcare services compounds these issues. A House of Commons Library briefing in 2022 highlighted the need for innovative healthcare solutions, such as mobile health units and community-based services, to bridge the gaps.

New Economics Foundation (2016) also underscored the importance of integrating health and wellbeing in coastal regeneration efforts. It recommended initiatives like using coastal and marine environments for public health programmes, promoting outdoor activities, and improving mental health services through community engagement and local support networks.

Housing and environmental challenges

Housing is also a significant issue in coastal communities in its own right. A House of Lords Library briefing on 'Housing in Rural and Coastal Communities' (2023) highlighted the prevalence of poor-quality housing, particularly older properties and HMOs, which contribute to fuel poverty and health problems. The rise of second homes and holiday rentals reduced the availability of affordable housing for local residents, driving up prices and displacing long-term inhabitants.

Environmental challenges, particularly flood risk and coastal erosion, pose serious threats to the sustainability of these communities. Local authorities are responsible for flood risk management but are often underfunded and lacking in technical expertise (House of Commons Library, 2024; Local Government Association, n.d.). New Economics Foundation (2016) called for innovative solutions such as restoring natural defences, supporting sustainable land man-

agement, and involving communities in planning for coastal change.

Educational deficits

Education in coastal areas faced chronic challenges, with schools struggling with teacher recruitment and retention, leading to lower educational attainment among students (House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns, 2019). The Whitty report (2022) noted high rates of absenteeism and limited opportunities for post-secondary education and skills training. This lack of educational infrastructure contributed to a brain drain, with young people leaving coastal towns in search of better prospects inland.

New Economics Foundation (2016) recommended developing tailored educational and skills strategies for coastal communities, including vocational training in marine industries, renewable energy, and digital skills. It also advocated incentives to attract and retain teachers, such as housing support and loan forgiveness programmes.

Policy interventions and limitations

In the decade leading up to 2024, various policy initiatives attempted to address these challenges. Two Government initatives, the Coastal Communities Fund and the Coastal Revival Fund, provided competitive, short-term grants, while the Levelling Up agenda aimed to tackle regional inequalities. However, these efforts fell short of delivering meaningful, sustained support. The House of Lords Liaison Committee (2023) followed up on the Select Committee's 'Future of Seaside Towns' report, repeating the call for long-term strategic funding and pointing to the need for joined-up Government with recommendations to create a cross-departmental taskforce to coordinate policies for coastal regions and appoint a dedicated Minister to give coastal communities a voice at the highest levels of government.

Academic research

An important research initiative to boost understanding and resilience of coastal communities and seas was launched in July 2024 by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), funded by three of its research councils (Economic and Social Research Council, Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council) jointly with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), following an open funding call launched in October 2023.

Coordinated by the Coast-R Network based at the University of Hull, the programme features five major strategic projects involving academic teams from the Universities of Hull, Essex, Greenwich, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Southampton, Aberystwyth, Cardiff, Plymouth, Queen's University Belfast, Portsmouth, Strathclyde, Birkbeck London, East Anglia, Kent, Manchester, Queen Mary London, Bradford, King's College London, Sunderland, Heriot-Watt and UHI Orkney, as well as coastal and marine partners and communities across all four UK nations.

Key Cities

While not focused expressly on coastal communities, several insights and recommendations in recent Key Cities policy reports are relevant to the challenges and opportunities they face.

'Culture and Place in Britain' (Key Cities, 2023-1) highlights the power of culture to engage and connect people with their places and the link between poor access to culture and deprivation. Its recommendations for hyperlocal devolution to connect policy agendas and empower communities; a programme to scale up development of creative industries microclusters; patient building of capacity in cultural ecosystems; and supporting inclusive access to culture including through public libraries, all remain pertinent in this context.

The role of education and skills in creating sustainable coastal communities runs through every aspect of this report and many conclusions in the Key Cities report on 'Skills for Cities, Skills for Life' (2023-2) bear repeating, including the recommendation that powers and funding for skills should be devolved not just to combined authorities but to municipalities to better tailor provision to local needs and opportunities; increased focus and funding for information and advice about careers and skills training; and better pathways and opportunities from age 14 through to lifelong learning.

'Civic Partners in Net Zero' (Key Cities Innovation Network, 2024) presented a compendium of innovation projects involving network universities, two of which – the 'Morecambe Bay Curriculum' (Lancaster University) and 'Stories in the Dust' (University of Southampton) have particular relevance to engaging young people in coastal areas with their environment and climate science. They connect well with the experience and approach of the Estuary Festival and Plymouth Sound National Marine Park's 'Sea for Yourself' which are described in the Appendix to this report.

Finally, the calls made in the Key Cities Manifesto (2024) for Council Tax reform, fair funding for social care (including targeted support for ageing populations), housebuilding and planning are all of great significance for disadvantaged coastal areas.

Opportunities for the Government

At first glance, the challenges facing coastal communities are felicitously aligned with the programme of the new Government elected in July 2024, whose five stated missions all require meaningful effort relevant to coastal communities if they are to be achieved.

Securing high levels of sustained growth will need substantial productivity improvement in many coastal areas to match – never mind improve on – the national average. Key City Hull is among those already playing an important part in the mission to become a clean energy superpower, but achieving the Government's targets will need further infrastructure investment and removal of obstacles in all coastal regions. Health remains an issue where coastal communities continue to experience deep-seated and persistent disadvantage for reasons that are not fully understood. Remote areas are vulnerable to crime, and there is a widespread sense in many coastal communities that any opportunities created in their area are not for local people.

Specifically, the Government has pledged to address issues identified in this report through several key commitments.

The 2024 Labour manifesto promised to maximize 5G and gigabit broadband coverage by 2030, which could significantly improve digital connectivity in coastal areas. The commitment to devolve more powers to local authorities offers an opportunity to enhance transport provision and infrastructure. In healthcare, the introduction of neighbourhood health centres and expanded roles for community pharmacists aims to bridge service gaps in underserved coastal communities. Housing reforms, including changes to the planning system and incentives for affordable home construction, are intended to tackle the housing crisis.

Since it was elected, the Government has launched a Flood Resilience Taskforce to coordinate flooding preparation and provide long-term, strategic thinking to better protect communities. Bringing together Government and external stakeholders, the taskforce oversees national and local flood resilience

and preparedness for the winter flood season. It has also launched the 'Floods and Droughts Research Infrastructure', led by the Natural Environment Research Council and the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, as a UK-wide network dedicated to understanding the impact of extreme weather conditions in the UK. Part of its remit is to identify where flood and drought incidents are likely to occur and plan to limit their impact.

Coastal communities are sceptical that politics can deliver and vulnerable to easy promises.

Announcements consistent with the Government's manifesto pledges have also been made on digital transformation, devolution, health and housing, albeit not expressly focused on coastal communities.

"That's all well and good, Jon, but it's not for me and my family, is it?"

The Government's commitments and first steps could point towards shifting the dial on the longstanding and deep-rooted decline of these places. But the political challenge, critical to making progress here, is encapsulated in the response typically encountered by local authority officials seeking to attract new investment in coastal areas (see page 20). These communities have every reason to be wary of new dawns. They are sceptical that politics can deliver, and vulnerable to easy promises that the clock could be turned back to better times, whether that is realistic or not.

What they do know is that the Government's commitments will only be delivered in their areas if they are planned and deployed as part of a coordinated, strategic approach to coastal regeneration in which they feel they have agency.

2 Key Cities

Kasper de Graaf and Kevin McKenzie

Kevin McKenzie is Policy and Intelligence Advisor at Plymouth City Council

Local authorities are at the sharp end of dealing with the challenges of our coastal communities.

Many Key Cities have significant coastal areas within their jurisdiction around the country: Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole, Cumberland, Hull, Lancaster, Medway, Newport, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southampton and Sunderland. Others – Exeter, Lincoln, Norwich, Preston and Salford – though further inland, have close links with nearby coastal communities and ports. The network offers a nuanced insight into the challenges and opportunities along our coastline and a framework for coordinated development and evaluation of new approaches at all levels: national, regional and local.

Coastal communities range from some of the most deprived in the country to the wealthiest in Europe. The wealth of some, however, has little impact on the deprivation of many, and even the well-to-do face challenges brought on by climate change and hollowed out public services, from healthcare to policing to transport.

Strategic priorities

A consultation with coastal Key Cities – including a survey of the member authorities and a workshop with Council Officers – took account of three priorities highlighted at the outset by portfolio lead Cllr Evans:

1. To build on the definition of coastal communities and support further research to understand potential disadvantage of coastal areas.

   The previously used ONS definition excluded coastal towns and cities with populations greater than 225,000, so its datasets omitted almost half of coastal residents – around five million people – from official statistics. A more accurate definition will support research into the 'hidden' coastal disadvantage. Attention should also be paid to communities which have been displaced by development from their historical proximity to, and identification with, the sea.
2. To work with others across the network to address the burden of ill health and deficit in educational spending.

   Standard mortality ratios are higher in coastal areas for cancer, circulatory disease, stroke, respiratory disease and 'preventable disease'. GPs in coastal communities have more patients per full-time doctor, and there are 15% fewer consultants and 7.4% fewer nurses per patient. There is a disproportionately high number of children in low-income families, and a significantly higher proportion of adults with low or no qualifications. Children in coastal areas lack visible opportunities outside the low-paid hospitality and care sectors.
3. To recognise the important role of ports in our renaissance as a global trading nation.

The UK's maritime sector needs to adapt to some of the new opportunities represented by economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region, offshore energy and other developments. Our departure from the EU brings with it a new regulatory framework and associated burdens for port authorities. The British Ports Association has set out the key challenges:

- Designing a ports infrastructure system that enables economic growth
- Developing a pathway for smart ports and overcoming modernisation challenges
- Leveraging the benefits of port development for local economies
- Next steps for decarbonising ports and their operations
- Future customs arrangements
- Establishing a system that fosters and drives innovation

Pressing issues

All authorities who responded to the survey say their coastal areas, when compared with their wider Council area, are notably disadvantaged in relation to educational attainment and child poverty. 89% see that disadvantage also for health outcomes, and 78% for existing skills levels.

In Plymouth, travelling just a few miles toward the waterfront results in a loss of over a year in life expectancy.

The survey reveals that in order of priority, the most pressing issues for member authorities are child poverty, health and care, skills provision, opportunities for young people, coastal erosion and flood risk, ageing populations and empty or second homes. Other issues cited include the conversion of former B&B properties into low quality, high turnover social lets; transient populations; homelessness; substance abuse; poor public transport; and lack of community cohesion.

Some of these points were echoed by officers in the workshop discussion, noting that official statistics don't adequately or accurately capture local deprivation in coastal communities. When an affluent community is dropped into the middle of a deprived community, it changes the statistics in that postcode but has little or no impact on the deprivation that was already there, fuelling resentment and undermining cohesion.

"We can literally map life expectancy by proximity to the coast. The closer to the waterfront, the shorter the lives."

Disconnect

"Many young people don't think they have the right to aspire to the jobs coming into the city," reported Jon Beaney of Sunderland City Council. "Tell a taxi driver about the jobs and regeneration and they'll often say, 'That's all well and good, Jon, but it's not for me and my family, is it?' It's perceived to be for people who are going to come in."

Why – some locals think – should we pursue STEM qualifications and skills required for new opportunities that aren't really for us? Two thirds of survey respondents agreed that lack of aspiration in local communities is a notable barrier to matching them with incoming high-skilled jobs.

There is a serious issue with low educational attainment in coastal areas and the skills gap between school leavers and employment opportunities.

If you don't get a job where you live, how easy it to get to the next town or city to find work there? "We can be quite isolated from neighbouring areas," Hull City Council's Martin Budd pointed out. "Psychologically that is how we think of people in coastal areas, but it's just because the infrastructure isn't as good as it should be to connect us."

That point too is reinforced in the survey, with most respondents saying their rail and road connections are inadequate and two thirds signalling problems with digital connectivity for hard-to-reach communities.

Professor Sheena Asthana, participating in the workshop on behalf of the Innovation Network, highlighted that the public investment to tackle low educational attainment in London between 2003 and 2013 – which included the £80m London Challenge programme to improve secondary schools – succeeded in turning around educational outcomes in the capital and demonstrated what is possible. "We now have a real problem around the coast," she commented, "and there's something to be said for targeted funding to address this."

Skills and jobs

Skills and pathways are key to building capacity in coastal communities, attracting inward investment and connecting local people with jobs. Central to that is the "golden triangle", outlined by Prof. Helen Marshall in the 'Skills for Cities, Skills for Life' report published last year (Key Cities 2023-2): jobs, training and transport all have to be locally accessible for pathways to work.

There is plenty of evidence of coastal Key Cities pulling their weight in driving green growth.

The Hull factory of Siemens Gamesa, the world's second largest manufacturer of wind turbines, which opened in 2016 and has seen a new £1 billion investment this year, symbolises the Government's commitment to the green energy revolution, and Hull City Council has worked hard to ensure local communities will benefit through what it calls the "green pothole approach".

"Where do the people to do these jobs come from?" asks Martin Budd. The risk was that the new opportunities would suck all the best talent out of businesses that were already there and collapse existing manufacturing in the city, so the Council focused on training up local people to backfill the vacancies created by those who got jobs at Siemens Gamesa. They also addressed the huge gender disparity in renewable energy and industrial manufacturing by creating a 'Women Into Manufacturing and Engineering' (WIME) project. In this way, Hull consciously used the impact of a major employer for training and skills and as a wider economic aspirational tool.

Sunderland too is working to ensure local people benefit from new opportunities. "Modern motor manufacturing at Nissan is a highly skilled but accessible opportunity for people if they've got basic STEM skills and qualifications," Jon Beaney points out, while Crown Works Studios, a £450m new film and television studio investment that includes £25 million from the new Government – will create more than 8,000 creative industries jobs "with skills that in Sunderland people would still regard as proper jobs – joiners, carpenters, electricians, plumbers." Sunderland also has a Housing Innovation Construction Skills Academy to develop the skills base that will be needed to build the homes of the future in Sunderland and nationwide.

Growth

Coastal cities have an important contribution to make to national growth and productivity, not least in renewables and trade, but their situation needs to be understood and catered for to create a successful and sustain-

able future. “Coastal cities, towns and ports were built around water for trade and wealth, but national planning policies guide us away from developing in areas of flood risk,” Hull City Council’s Rachel Glossop points out.

More than half of the coastal Key Cities are port cities, so the economic future of ports is an important topic. Two thirds of the port cities responding to the survey see trade by sea – whether short or long haul – as the predominant objective for sustainabe port redevelopment, with the remainder citing mixed development including marine leisure, FLOW (floating offshore wind), energy and associated supply change, fishing and mixed-use development including sea trade, multi-modal and clean energy (on and off shore).

Bounded by the sea and often by rivers, many port cities are constrained when it comes to land use. “We have nothing you’d describe as urban sprawl,” says Kelly Nash of Portsmouth City Council. “We butt up against the water on one side, and the chalk hill borders us at the top.” One brownfield site which Portsmouth has been seeking to develop for many years has become less viable over time due to concerns around flood defence requirements, natural designations and a regulatory burden that has become more acute over time. The site could provide much of the city’s strategic housing requirement and presents a test for the new Government’s determination to speed up development.

Infrastructure is a critical enabler of growth, and almost half of respondents believe that their connection to the National Grid is not sufficient to support plans for sustainable development.

In the survey, several coastal Key Cities highlight areas of economic opportunity based on local skills and resources. Cumberland: “The ‘new’ nuclear sector (and) other clean energy and port operations.” Portsmouth: “Marine deep water.” Newport: “FDI relating to Compound Semiconductor manufacturing and R&D.” Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole: “FinTech and Future Health, maximising the oldest population in the UK.”

Public investment

There is a widespread sense among local authorities that the criteria used by Government to assess public regeneration investment – such as the Treasury Green Book rules – unfairly prejudice coastal areas and fail to account properly for the potential and the social need for investment. One measure in particular – the Land Value Uplift (LVU) calculation – puts coastal areas at an immediate disadvantage, with restrictions on high-rise developments on the coast and the limitations of a 180-degree boundary where services and infrastructure can only cater for half the catchment area of inland counterparts.

86% of those surveyed do not believe the current criteria for regeneration funding are suitable for producing sustainable outcomes in coastal areas, commenting that:

“The criteria rarely take account of viability issues in our area, where land is scarce and prices are high.”

“Assessments should take more account of local need and context… Vari-

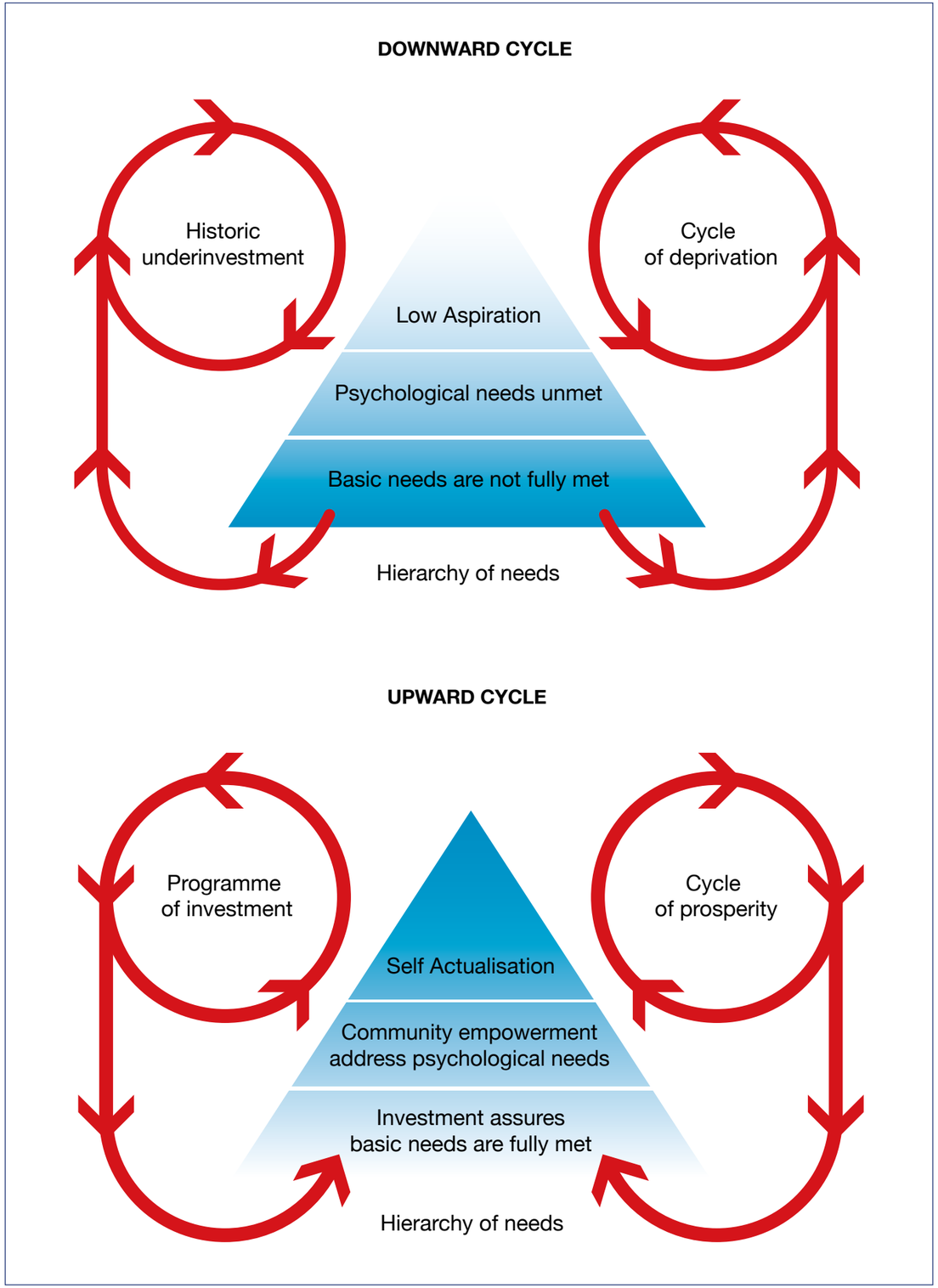


Figure 2.1 (right): Reversing the cycle of decline in coastal communities

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs shows how the historic underinvestment and generational cycles of deprivation in ports and coastal communities impact on their social fabric and levels of aspiration. Economic growth alone cannot fix this. Concomitant investment in services to develop human and social capital is needed to create empowered communities and enable individuals to reach their full potential.

ations within an area are not sufficiently picked up."

"We need a softer qualitative measure that measures social regeneration."

"The Treasury Green Book is generally viewed as out of date and no longer entirely fit for purpose. A full review feels appropriate."

Three quarters also see the risks of floods and coastal erosion negatively impacting delivery of housing targets and inward investment.

Data collaboration

For all the strengths in some of our coastal cities, it is important to remember that there are many coastal areas, both urban and remote, that are among the least engaged and most disadvantaged in the country, and overall, the picture is one of depressed productivity, low educational attainment, poor health outcomes and a lack of opportunity.

Some of the ways in which Government needs to engage with this are set out in the recommendations in this and previous reports. In parallel, there are important things local authorities, stakeholders and communities could do to drive partnership and co-creation. High on that list is data collaboration, with more than half of survey respondents reporting that they don't have adequate and sufficient data on which to design appropriate policy interventions – an issue most keenly felt in relation to public health, educational attainment, child poverty and tourism. 89% believe that better sharing and coordination of data could improve outcomes for coastal communities and ports.

Some of the concerns cited include:

"Most data is at LSOA level. This means it is not granular enough to devise interventions on individual circumstances and it is not possible to do correlations. Interventions are therefore based on assumptions rather than being targeted specifically, which correlations would enable."

"It's often difficult to source current economic data, e.g. on skills, jobs, per capita GVA, on the right footprint. Often data is only available regionally and we have to use local proxy data from sources like the DWP who tend to focus on supply side, i.e. unemployment rather than demand."

"IMD 2019 is now five years old, so the city council doesn't have an up-to-date insight into the deprivation context of particular areas. We are exploring the potential to develop a Community Needs Index which would inform evidence-based policy intervention."

Professor Asthana agreed that "we're not making enough of Council data," citing as an example that data about people not putting their bins out could alert services to an opportunity for early intervention. "There is a huge amount of Council data that could be put into population health management datasets, but at the moment there is no easy way of doing that. There's a two-way relationship we need to build up to understand how we can maximise the use of data."

Research

3 Evidence of neglect

Prof. Sheena Asthana and Prof. Sheela Agarwal
Co-Directors, Centre for Coastal Communities, University of Plymouth

An overview of relevant work by researchers at the University of Plymouth and other member universities of the Key Cities Innovation Network, and policy implications for central and local government.

Recent policy outputs including the 2021 Chief Medical Officer's Annual Report (Whitty and Loveless, 2021, pp. 189-208), the 2022 Levelling up White Paper (HM Government, 2022), the House of Lords Liaison Committee (2023) and Pragmatix Advisory (2023) highlight persistent disadvantage amongst coastal cities alongside the fact that many continue to fall below the national average when benchmarked against a range of economic and social indicators.

Those that are particularly struggling are characterised by high levels of unemployment and worklessness, low incomes, seasonal jobs, low skills, low educational attainment, unaffordable housing, and poor health outcomes (Agarwal et al., 2023; Asthana and Gibson, 2022; Corfe, 2019; New Economics Foundation, 2016).

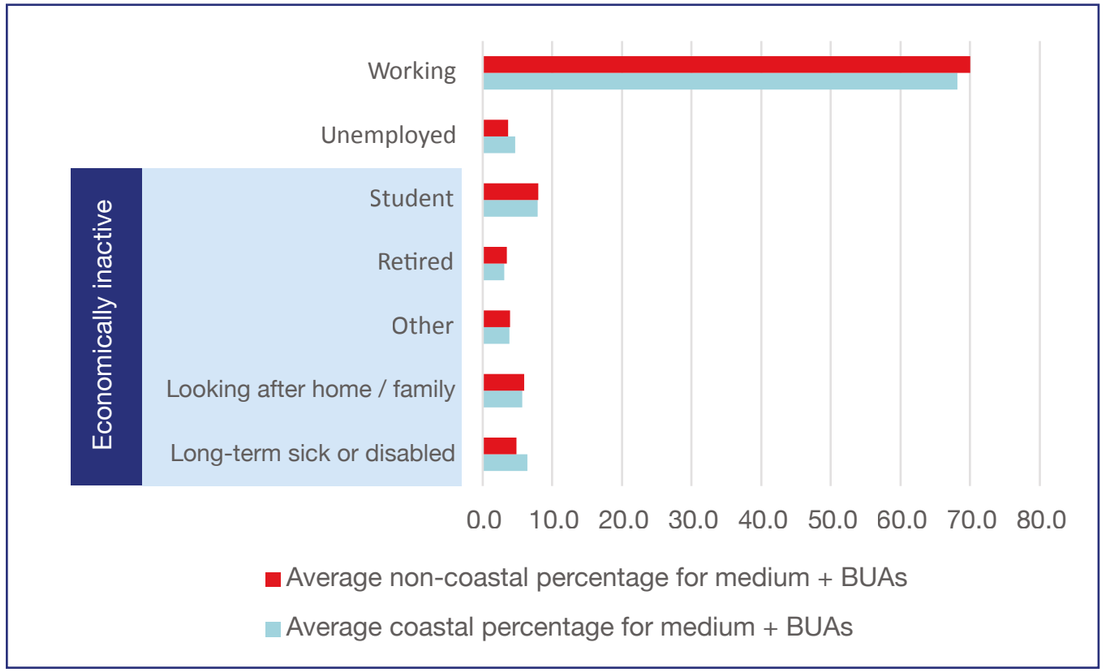
This chapter aims to highlight the challenges facing coastal cities drawing on the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2021) categorisation of 'Built Up Areas' (BUAs) for medium, large, and major sized localities with populations greater than 30,000 (ONS, 2021) . Additionally, we summarise some of the academic knowledge which exists in relation to coastal cities amongst member universities of the Key Cities Innovation Network (KCIN).

The economy of coastal cities

Coastal cities have historically played a crucial role in Britain's economic development. While shipping and logistics remain important to many sectors such as education, healthcare, financial services, aerospace, digital technology, tourism and the creative industries, the legacy of structural change, industrial decline and geography (notably peripheral location), has assumed greater significance. Although they possess unique cultural and historical assets, and despite regeneration particularly around their waterfronts, many coastal cities struggle with persistent issues related to worklessness, low average earnings, higher than average levels of personal insolvencies and multiple deprivation.

Worklessness including the economically inactive and the unemployed comprises a significant proportion of the population who are not participating in the labour market in medium, large, and major coastal BUAs. According to the ONS (2021), these coastal BUAs had a lower proportion of usual residents aged 16 to 64 years who were working (68.2%) than their non-coastal counterparts (70.0%), a larger proportion who were unemployed, 4.7% and 3.7% respectively, and a greater number who were economically inactive, 26.9% in coastal BUAs as opposed to 26.3% in non-coastal BUAs (see Figure 3.1). Unemployment amongst usual residents aged between 16-64 years old was highest in the major coastal BUAs of Hull (5.9%), Liverpool (5.7%), Brighton and Hove (5.5%) and Portsmouth (5.2%), in the large coastal cities of Blackpool (5.5%), Sunderland (5.4%), Hartlepool (5.3%) and Bournemouth (5.1%), and in the medium coastal BUAs of Great Yarmouth (7.4%), Skegness (6.6%), South Shields (6.4%) and Fleetwood (5.8%) (ONS, 2021). In contrast, the percentage of usual residents aged between 16-64 years old who were working was highest in the major BUAs of Plymouth (69.1%), Portsmouth (68.7%), Brighton and Hove (68.3%), and Southampton (67.5%), in the large cities of Worthing (75.8%), Poole (75.0%), Weston-Super-Mare (74.6%) and Medway (72.4%), and in the medium coastal BUAs of Portishead (80.4%), Clevedon (79.0%), Totton (78.0%) and Chafford Hundred and West Thurrock (77.9%).

Figure 3.1:Average percentage of economically active persons in coastal and non-coastal BUAs (ONS, 2021).



Worklessness in medium, large, and major coastal BUAS can in part be explained by their social ecologies. Coastal BUAs exhibited a higher proportion of retired people (24.7%) than non-coastal BUAs (20.6%) (ONS, 2021). The major coastal BUAs with the highest percentage of economically inactive retirees include Plymouth (21.8%), Portsmouth (18.2%), Hull (18.2%) and Liverpool (16.8%). Meanwhile the large coastal BUAs exhibiting the greatest percentage of economically inactive retirees are Sunderland (29.5%), Eastbourne (27.6%), Poole (26.5%) and Worthing (26.0%) and the medium coastal BUAs included Rustington (41.9%), Seaford (39.1%), Bexhill-On-Sea (38.9%) and Lytham St. Annes (37.7%) (see Figure 3.2). Moreover, there is a higher proportion of people who were "disabled and limited a

Figure 3.2: Average percentage for medium, large, and major coastal BUAs of economically inactive: retired (Key Cities highlighted).

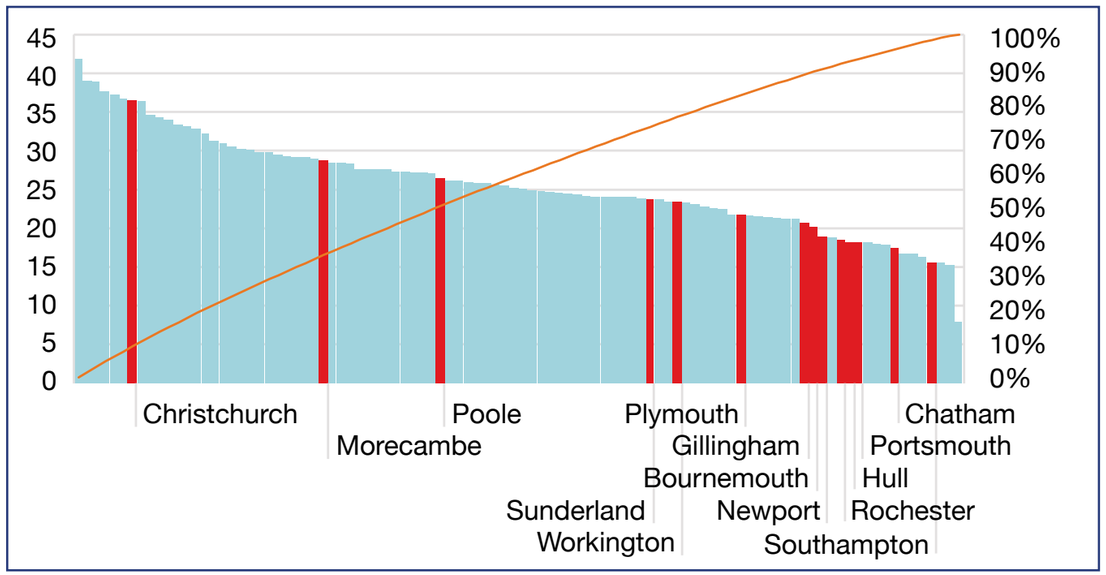


Figure 3.3: Average percentage of those reporting disability who are limited a lot and a little in medium, large, and major coastal and non-coastal BUAs.

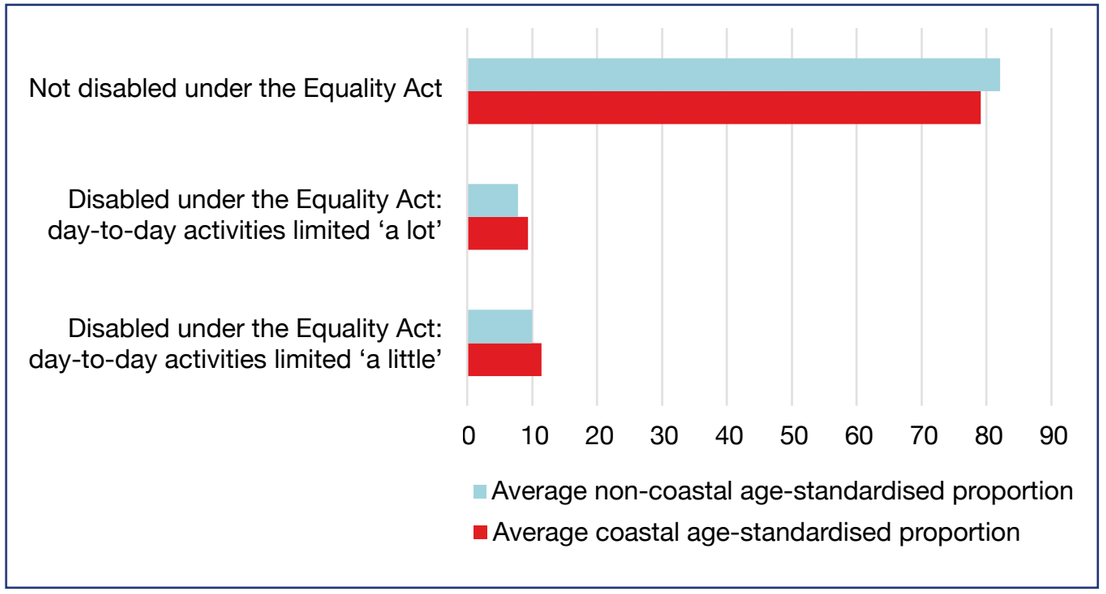
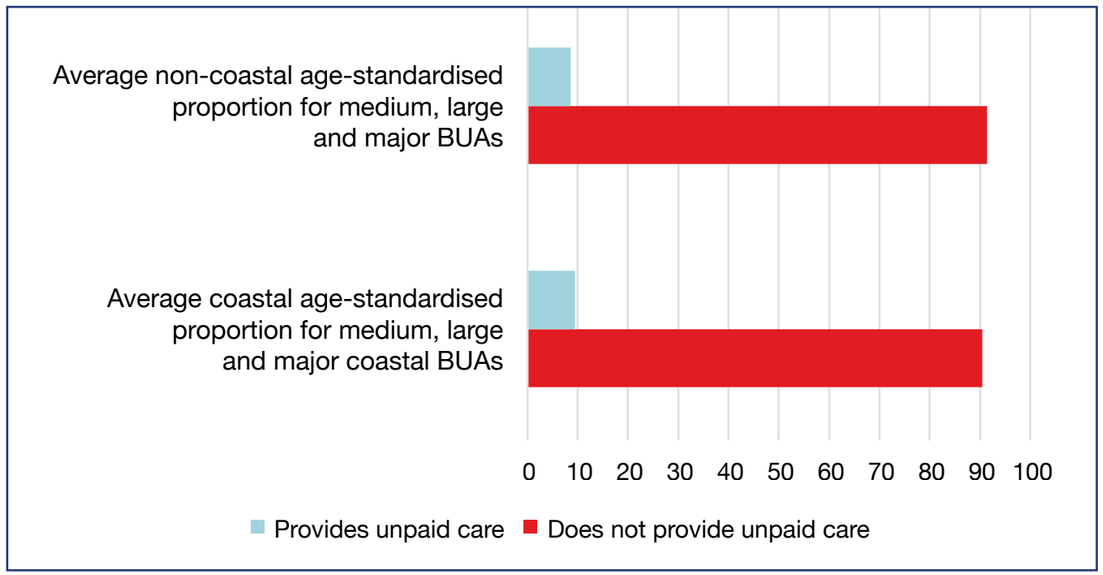


Figure 3.4: Age-standardised proportions of usual residents by unpaid carer status for coastal and non-coastal medium, large, and major BUAs.



lot" (5.3%) than in non-coastal BUAs (4.1%) (ONS, 2021). Even after controlling for age, there were higher proportions of people who were "disabled and limited a lot" in coastal (9.2%) compared with non-coastal (7.5%) BUAs (see Figure 3.3). Moreover, coastal BUAs exhibited smaller proportions of people reporting very good health (45.4%) than non-coastal BUAs (47.7%), and more people in bad (4.9%) or very bad health (1.5%) than non-coastal BUAs: bad health 4.1%, very bad health 1.2%. Residents providing unpaid care also account for a certain degree of worklessness. For medium, large, and major coastal BUAs, the average coastal age-standardised proportion of residents providing unpaid care was higher at 9.5% compared with 8.6% for their non-coastal counterparts (ONS, 2021) (see Figure 3.4).

Some worklessness can also be explained by those usual residents aged between 16 to 64 years old with no qualifications which for medium, large, and major coastal BUAs was 19.7% as opposed to 18.6% in their non-coastal counterparts (ONS, 2021). Conversely those with higher education qualifications within these coastal and non-coastal BUAs was higher in the latter (34.3%) and lower in the former (29.0%). Across the major coastal BUAs, those exhibiting the highest percentage of higher education qualifications were Brighton and Hove (39.6%), Cardiff (39.4%), Southampton (31.6%), and Liverpool (30.6%) (See Figure 3.5). Amongst the large coastal BUAS, the highest percentage of higher education qualifications were Bournemouth (33.2%), Worthing, (31.7%), Southport (31.5%) and Swansea (31.3%), while Penarth (48.6%), Whitley Bay (45.3%), Portishead (40.9%) and Formby (40.4%) had the highest percentage of usual residents with higher education qualification in medium-sized BUAs (ONS, 2021).

Conversely, Hull (25.1%), Liverpool (22.3%), Portsmouth (17.4%) and Southampton (17.3%) are major coastal BUAs which had the highest proportion of usual residents aged 16 years and over with no qualifications (Figure 3.5). Meanwhile, Grimsby (25.8%), Blackpool (24.2%), Sunderland (23.8%) and

Figure 3.5: Proportion of usual residents aged 16 years and over with the highest level of qualification for medium, large, and major coastal BUAs (Key Cities highlighted).

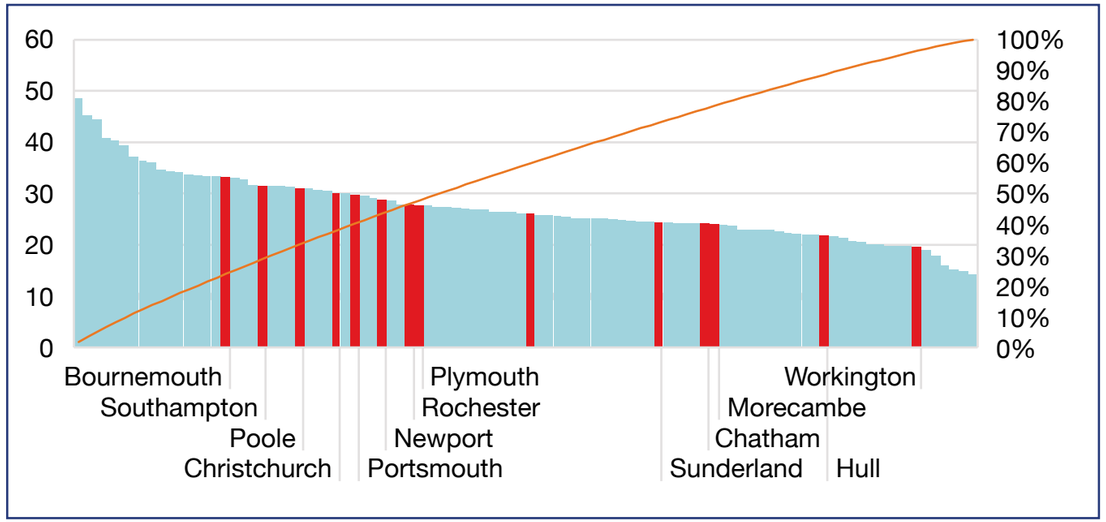
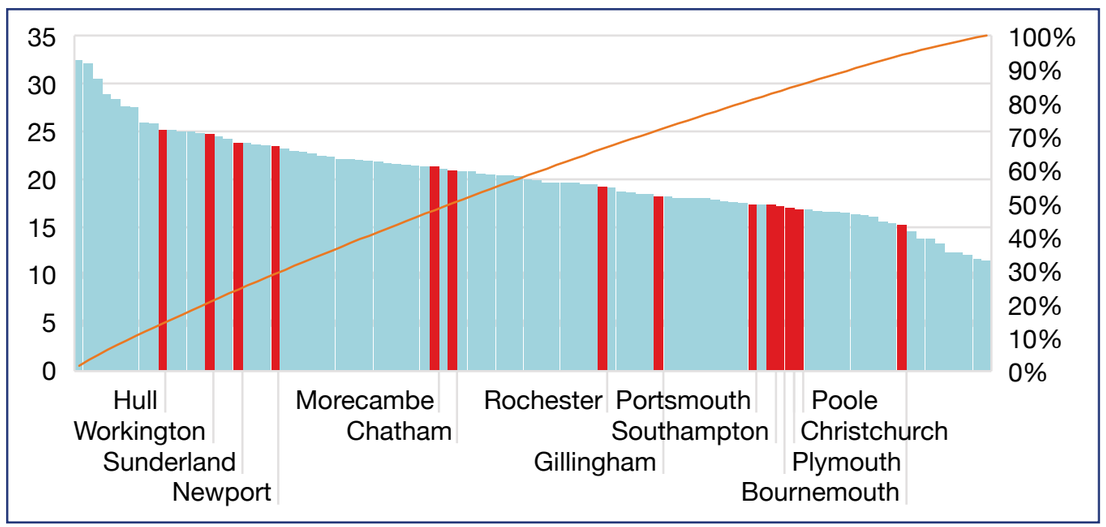


Figure 3.6: Proportion of usual residents aged 16 years and over with no qualification for medium, large, and major coastal BUAs (Key Cities highlighted).



Hartlepool (23.6%) are large coastal BUAs and Skegness (32.4%), Great Yarmouth (32.1%), Clacton-on-Sea (30.5%), and Canvey Island (28.8%) are medium-sized coastal BUAs with the highest proportion of usual residents aged 16 years and over with no qualifications (See Figure 3.6).

English Coastal cities often experience significant disparities in wealth and living conditions. Many of these cities contain areas of severe deprivation. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (MHCLG 2019), several coastal cities such as Blackpool, Liverpool and Hull have some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England. Between the period 2018 and 2022, according to the ONS (2021), coastal local authorities have dominated the rankings for the areas with the highest levels of personal insolvencies in England and Wales (Table 3.1). In 2018, six out of the top ten local authorities with the highest levels of personal insolvencies in England and Wales were coastal, with Scarborough, Torbay, Plymouth, Hull, and Blackpool placed in positions two to six respectively. In 2020, eight out of the top ten local authorities with the highest level of insolvencies per 10,000 adults were coastal, with Hull being ranked first, Blackpool second, and Scarborough third:

#	LA	2018	LA	2020
1	Stoke-on-Trent	51.9	Hull	44.6
2	Scarborough	47.8	Blackpool	42.2
3	Torbay	45.7	Scarborough	41.6
4	Plymouth	45.2	NE Lincs	41.4
5	Hull	44.9	Stoke-on-Trent	41.3
6	Blackpool	43.8	Plymouth	41.1
7	Corby	42.1	Eastbourne	38.1
8	Burnley	40.4	Hastings	38.1
9	Barnsley	39.9	Corby	37.7
10	Stockton-on-Tees	39.8	Dover	36.2
	UK Average	24.7	UK Average	23.7

Table 3.1: : Top 10 local authorities (LA) in England and Wales with the highest personal bankruptcy rates in the last 12 months – total insolvencies per 10,000 adults, 2018 and 2020 (ONS, 2021).

Overall based on selected economic indicators, the evidence presented illustrates that when compared against non-coastal locations, coastal communities appear to be much worse off and the issues experienced are consistent with those identified in previous studies (Agarwal et al., 2023; Asthana and Agarwal, forthcoming).

Offshore renewable energy

The transition to a green economy presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Britain's coastal cities. Coastal cities are investing in wind and other renewable technologies, which could play a leading role in the UKs efforts to meet its carbon reduction targets. Hull for example is a central hub for offshore wind in England. The city is home to Siemens Gamesa's factory which manufactures wind turbine blades and is close to the Orsted Hornsea wind farms. Run from Grimsby, a fishing town of much diminished economic capacity, it has delivered thousands of high-quality jobs and billions of pounds of investment in the UKs offshore wind supply chain (Laister, 2022), supporting other nearby large scale wind farms like the Humber Gateway. There are plans also to develop an Orsted 3 project, the world's largest FLOW (Floating Offshore Wind) project, commissioned in 2027, supporting up to 5,000 jobs during construction and 1,200 permanent jobs once operational (Wind Europe, 2024). More recently, the UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNEZ) in 2024 awarded Ørsted Contracts for Difference (CfD) for Orsted Hornsea 3 and 4, clearly signalling its intent to increase the volume of renewable energy in the UK.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the wider north east region are involved in the renewable energy supply chain, support engineering and technological developments for offshore wind farms in the North Sea. The Rampion offshore wind farm lies off the coast of Sussex, with Brighton its nearest coastal city, whilst Plymouth is involved with offshore renewable energy research and development and Southampton is developing its port to support the offshore wind supply chain in the

English Channel.

Collectively, offshore renewable energy provides a means to economically regenerate coastal towns as well as an alternative source of employment and revenue generated by their development (including parts e.g. blades), maintenance and supply chains. However, a lack of skilled workforce clearly limits the opportunities for residents. Thus, building a talent pipeline for the future to increase those with high-level electrical, engineering, and digital analytical skills should be an urgent long-term government priority.

Crime

Surprisingly, the rates of all crime, excluding anti-social behaviour occurring in medium, large, and major coastal BUAs was higher at 161.3 than in their non-coastal counterparts (excluding London), this being recorded at 150.7 per 1,000 usual residents aged between 15-65 years old. Excluding anti-social behaviour, the highest rate of crime per 1,000 usual residents aged between 15-65 years old amongst the medium, large, and major coastal BUAs were found in Great Yarmouth (311.2), Skegness (285.2), Blackpool (234.6), Hartlepool (233.3) and Grimsby (230.8), whilst the lowest rates were exhibited in Falmouth (70.4), Seaford (74.1), Clevedon (74.3), Exmouth (75.5) and Portishead (75.6). Across all types of crime rates (e.g., violence and sexual offences, robbery, burglary, bicycle theft, shoplifting, theft from person, vehicle crime, theft offences, criminal damage and arson, drugs, possession of weapons, public order, and anti-social behaviour), Great Yarmouth and Skegness featured as the highest in seven crime categories, Blackpool in six, Grimsby and Chafford and West Thurrock in five, Liverpool in three, and Hartlepool, Hull, Birkenhead, Ashington, Southampton, Redcar, and Brighton and Hove in two categories of crime.

Excluding London, rates per 1,000 usual residents aged between 15-65 years old in medium, large, and major coastal BUAs were higher for violence and sexual offences (72.9), shoplifting (12.9), criminal damage and arson (17.2), drugs (6.1), public order (17.1), and anti-social behaviour (30.0) than in non-coastal medium, large and major BUAs recorded at 66.1, 12.7, 14.5, 4.5, 15.5 and 25.5 respectively. Those coastal BUAs which exhibited the highest rates of violence and sexual offences per 1,000 usual residents aged between 15-65 years old were Great Yarmouth (158.4), Skegness (135.5), Dover (118.6) and Blackpool (114.3), whilst those that recorded the lowest were Falmouth (33.5), Lee-on-Solent (34.0), Rustington (34.0), Seaford (35.2) and Portishead (35.6). The medium, large and major coastal BUAs with the highest rates of shoplifting were Shoreham-by-Sea (35.2), Ashington (30.4), Chafford Hundred and West Thurrock (30.2), Hartlepool (28.6) and Worthing (28.3) and those which recorded the lowest were Felixstowe (3.6), Wallasey (4.3), Crosby (4.4), Exmouth (4.5) and Thundersley and South Benfleet (4.6). For criminal damage and arson per 1,000 usual residents aged between 15-65 years old, the medium, large and major coastal BUAs with the highest rates include Great Yarmouth (34.1), Grimsby (31.8), Skegness (30.5), Workington (30.0), and Blyth (28.0) and the lowest were Lee-on-Solent (6.7), Clevedon (7.0), Portishead (7.1) and Seaford (7.8). Meanwhile, in relation to drugs, Liverpool (16.8), Bootle (16.4), Birkenhead (14.7), Skegness (11.0) and Great Yarmouth (10.3) were the highest and the lowest were Portishead (1.1), Clevedon (1.1), Christchurch (1.2), Whitley Bay (1.4) and Lee-on-Solent (1.4). For public order offences, Great Yarmouth (32.6), Birkenhead (29.9), Liverpool (28.0), Bootle (27.9) and Grimsby (26.9) showed the highest rates, and Falmouth (4.0), Lytham St. Anne's (5.9), Exmouth (6.4), Newquay (6.5) and Paignton (6.9), the lowest. For anti-social behaviour, Blackpool (96.7), Morecambe (82.3), Fleetwood (78.7), Scarborough (69.4) and Skegness (67.4) had the highest and Thundersley and South Benfleet (11.0), Clevedon (11.2), Southport (11.9), Maldon (12.4) and Crosby (13.2) had the lowest.

Children and young people

Coastal built-up areas (BUAs) in England have poorer educational outcomes than their non-coastal counterparts, although differences vary by stage of education and size of area. Using data from the Department of Education's Longitudinal Education Outcomes database, the performance gap at GCSE level is largest for medium-sized towns (20-75k population), 55.8% of pupils in coastal areas achieving 5 GCSE or more, including English and Maths, with grades A*–C compared to 61% in non-coastal areas. For cities with usual resident populations of 200k+, the difference in performance is small (54.4% vs 55.2%). By contrast, at key Stage 4 (aged 19), the gap is largest for cities, only 28.6% of young people in coastal cities staying in full-time higher education, compared to 34.5% in non-coastal areas. At this age, young people on the coast are more likely to be apprentices than their non-coastal peers (13.2% vs 10.3%). TUNDRA data (which track under-representation by area) show that, across all BUA categories, coastal young people are less likely to enter higher education: 36.7% in coastal cities, compared to 40.2% in non-coastal cities. This compares to a higher education rate of 54% in London.

The causes of lower educational attainment in coastal areas are complex. As elsewhere, factors such as financial and familial instability and a lack of educational capital in households play an important role. Areas in coastal cities are over-represented in OSCI's list of the worst ten percent of 'left behind neighbourhoods' (2022), a measure that captures high levels of socio-economic deprivation and the lack of civic assets, infrastructure and investment required to mitigate these challenges. Since 2014/15, DWP data on children in low-income families shows a significant shift in the distribution of child poverty away from London and towards the periphery. In all regions, the percentage of pupils receiving Free School Meals is higher in schools in coastal than non-coastal towns and cities.

A lack of educational capital is likely to impact upon psychosocial factors such as confidence and expectations with respect to the home learning environment. It also shapes families' knowledge and information about the school system and whether children come to school with a sense that education is not something they and their families are good at (Reay, 2017). Again, the percentage of adults (aged 16+) with no qualifications is higher in coastal than non-coastal towns and cities in all regions of England. In 2021, 33.0% and 23.4% of adults in coastal towns and cities in the East Midlands and East of England had no qualifications, compared to 13.4% in Inner London. 44.9%, 36.1% and 19.1% respectively had no or low (level 1) qualifications.

Low aspirations, reflecting poor employment opportunities may also play a part in poor educational performance. In contrast to the many visible opportunities in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds, the full spectrum of work opportunities may be a rather abstract concept for children on the coast. Opportunities for graduates certainly vary according to where you live. In coastal areas such as Lincolnshire and Cumbria, 42% and 49% of working graduates are in a job that requires a degree, compared to 65% in Inner London. Lacking access to 'high-end' jobs in IT, business and finance, many graduates in coastal areas are resorting to jobs in hospitality, retail, administration, call centres, supply teaching or in temporary positions on the minimum wage (Xu, 2023). Data compiled from the Longitudinal

Education Outcomes database also shows a significant drain of graduate skills, graduates migrating away from large and in particular, medium-sized coastal cities. The low proportion of residents aged 25-34 with L4 (higher education equivalent to first year of a University Degree) qualifications or above in large coastal cities (39.6%) is very marked, and in stark contrast to Inner (74.6%) and Outer London (57.4%).

Poor educational outcomes have important consequences for children's future life trajectories, including their risks of poor health (Asthana and Halliday, 2022). Because education predicts employment, income and access to material resources as well as psychosocial wellbeing (and related stress-induced immune changes) and health behaviours, it is arguably the single most important modifiable social determinant of health inequality. Sadly, the data suggests that children and young people on the coast are already at greater risk of mental distress. Data on hospital admissions from 2013/14 to 2017/18 show higher rates of admission for self-harm aged 10-24 years in coastal vs non-coastal BUAs. The differences between rates per 10,000 in coastal BUAs in the South West (321.5), East Midlands (310.2) and North West (303.5) and Inner (89.9) and Outer London (105.7) are alarming. Hospital admissions among under-18-year-olds for drug misuse are also higher in coastal vs non-coastal BUAs. Again, the differences between rates of admission per 1,000 in coastal BUAs in the East Midlands (29.1), North East (18.1) and North West (17.0) and Inner (5.2) and Outer (4.4) London are very stark. Very similar variation is observed for under-18 admissions for alcohol misuse.

As psychological distress is a risk factor for chronic inflammation and in turn the development of chronic and degenerative diseases, these worrying trends may signal the development of a future public health crisis on the periphery (Asthana and Gibson, 2022).

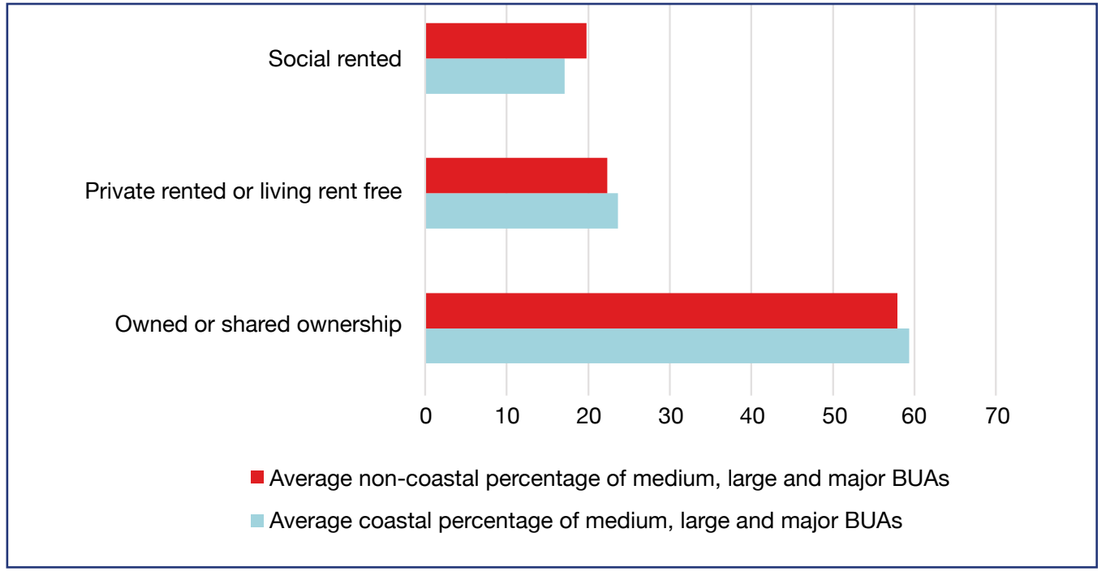
Housing

Housing quality in coastal cities can be problematic, especially in areas where deindustrialisation has led to long-term economic decline. Many coastal cities suffer from a lack of affordable and high-quality housing with much of the available stock being old and poorly maintained. In cities such as Blackpool and Hastings, old boarding houses have been converted into substandard rental properties often used to accommodate vulnerable populations. This has led to concentrations of poverty, social problems, and anti-social behaviour in certain areas.

Housing has an impact on health and wellbeing through both physical and psychosocial mechanisms. For example, cold homes, whether the result of structural issues or fuel poverty, have been implicated in a range of health outcomes such as increased risk of strokes, heart attacks and respiratory diseases among older people. However, the differences between coastal and non-coastal areas are very small and coastal areas tend to be advantaged with respect to other indicators of housing quality, such as overcrowding and air pollution.

Of growing interest is the role played by a home in providing "ontological security" or a sense of certainty and stability (Kearns et al., 2000; Hiscock et al., 2001; Rosenberg et al., 2021). Various aspects of housing such as housing displacement, precariousness of housing and housing tenure can undermine security by affecting sense of control, autonomy, status and empowerment (Rolfe et al., 2020; Mansour et al., 2022). In some coastal cities such as Blackpool, redundant tourist accommodation has been used to house transient and vulnerable people (including people subject to out-of-area social services displacements). People who are displaced from their home areas are separated from their jobs, their children's schools, and vital support networks, including family networks

Figure 3.7: Average proportion (%) of households by tenure in medium, large and major BUAs (ONS, 2021).



and are thus very likely to be at risk of ontological insecurity.

Housing accessibility also has a bearing on residential stability. Analysing the IMD (MHCLG 2019) LSOA-level affordability data, 22.5% of residents in non-coastal BUAs live in the most affordable quintile (20%) of 'owner occupier' LSOAs, compared to 14.6% of residents in coastal areas and 0.0% in London. Except for the North-East and Yorkshire and Humber, coastal BUAs also have lower rates of social housing, meaning that those who cannot afford to buy their own properties have to rent on the private market (22.5% vs 19.2% in coastal vs non-coastal BUAs, excluding London).

There is significant variation between coastal towns and cities with respect to housing tenure (see Figure 3.7). In medium, large, and major coastal BUAs, a greater percentage of households owned or shared ownership of their homes than their non-coastal counterparts. However, a greater percentage of households in coastal BUAs lived in private rented or rent-free accommodation and fewer lived in social rented housing than in non-coastal medium, large, and major BUAs. Amongst the medium-sized coastal BUAs, Great Yarmouth (37.7%), Bootle (48.4%), Skegness (51.1%) and Dover (53.8%) recorded the lowest percentage of households who owned or shared ownership of their homes. In contrast, the highest percentages were found in Formby (86.7%), Thundersley and South Benfleet (83.7%), Rustington (81.1%) and Whitley Bay (80.7%). For large coastal BUAs, Birkenhead (53.0%), Sunderland (55.6%), Bournemouth (56.1%) and Hastings (57.4%) exhibited the lowest percentage of households who owned or shared ownership of their homes whilst the highest were Southport (68.9%), Poole (68.5%), Worthing (68.2%) and Gillingham (66.5%). Meanwhile, Liverpool (48.3%), Southampton (48.9%), Hull (49.3%) and are major coastal BUAs with the lowest percentage of households who owned or shared ownership of their homes, and Plymouth (59.0%), Cardiff (58.0), Portsmouth (55.4%) and Brighton and Hove (52.2%) were the highest.

Across the medium coastal BUAs, the lowest percentage of households in private rented or living rent free occurred in Whitehaven (9.9%), Formby (9.9%), Rustington (11.9%) and Thundersley and Benfleet (12.3%) and the highest were recorded in Great Yarmouth (37.8%), Torquay (34.0%), Folkestone (31.9%) and Skegness (31.8%). In relation to the large coastal BUAs, Sunderland (16.5%), Hartlepool (18.0%), Newport (18.5%) and Poole (19.8%) recorded the highest percentages of households in private rented or living rent free, whilst the lowest were found in Bournemouth (10.4%), Blackpool (10.1%), Hastings (14.1%) and Eastbourne (13.4%). Amongst the major coastal BUAs, the lowest percentages of households in private rented or living rent free were recorded in Plymouth (22.8%), Hull (24.1%), Cardiff (24.6%) and Liverpool (25.5%) and the highest in Brighton and Hove (32.9%), Southampton (29.3%) and Portsmouth (27.4%).

In terms of the percentage of households living in social rented, amongst the medium-sized coastal BUAs, those exhibiting the lowest were Formby (3.4%), Thundersley and South Benfleet (4.0%), Chafford Hundred (6.3%) and Whitley Bay (6.8%); the highest were Bootle (32.4%), South Shields (29.9%), Workington (28.7%) and Havant (28.7%). For the large coastal BUAs, the lowest percentages were recorded for Southport (7.6%), Worthing (9.8%), Blackpool (10.1%) and Bournemouth (10.4%) and the highest were Sunderland (28.0%), Hartlepool (23.9%), Birkenhead (23.8%) and Newport (22.0%). Amongst the major BUAs, the lowest percentages of households in social rented accommodation were found in Brighton and Hove (14.9%), Portsmouth (17.2%), Cardiff and Plymouth (18.1%) and the highest in Hull (26.6%), Liverpool (26.1%) and Southampton (21.9%).

Private renting is a more insecure sector than either ownership or social housing. Thus, despite the stigmatisation of the tenure, social renting may confer psychosocial benefits through additional security. This is supported by a recent study (Clair et al, 2023) which explored the association between epigenetic ageing and housing circumstances using data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study. The analysis showed that living in a privately rented home is related to faster biological ageing and that the impact of private renting is greater than the impact of experiencing unemployment or being a former smoker. By contrast, social renting was not found to differ from outright ownership in terms of association with biological ageing once additional housing variables were included in the model.

Connected places

Many coastal cities such as Plymouth and Hull also face infrastructure and connectivity issues which limit their economic prospects. Poor transport links especially to inland cities and major economic hubs make it difficult for coastal areas to attract investment and retain skilled workers. Mobility and transport are key for working age adults with respect to accessing employment and for older people to remain healthy, active, and connected. The job access score is a measure of connectivity developed by the think tank Onward and includes the number of jobs accessible by car and public transport from every local area (LSOA) in the country across different time horizons (Blagdon and Tanner, 2021). The metric provides the reachable number of jobs and distance with 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 60 minutes and 90 minutes by both driving and public transport. A higher score indicates greater levels of job accessibility. Analysing this dataset, we find that people in coastal BUAs have access to about half the number of jobs compared to people in non-coastal areas. Inner London's population-weighted job access score is 4.57 times higher than that of coastal BUAs.

Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion has developed a broader measure of connectivity (OCSI, 2023). The Community Needs Connectedness score measures connectivity to key services, digital infrastructure, isolation, and strength of the local jobs market. It looks at whether residents have access to key services, such as health services, within a reasonable travel distance. It considers how good public transport and digital infrastructure are and how strong the local job market is. The Connectedness domain forms part of the Community Needs Index that was developed to identify areas experiencing poor community and civic infrastructure, relative isolation, and low levels of participation in community life. The index was created by combining a series of 28 indicators, conceptualised under three domains: Civic Assets, Connectedness and Active and Engaged Community. A higher score indicates that an area has higher levels of community need.

Unsurprisingly, analysis of OSCI's population-weighted connectedness score shows that coastal populations are far less connected than non-coastal populations (59.0 vs 40.4 for all regions excluding London). Highest rates of need are found in coastal BUAs in the East Midlands (111.0), Yorkshire and Humber (69.6) and the South-West (68.4). The lowest rates are in Inner (25.8) and Outer (20.0) London. Only 2% of LSOAs in English towns and cities are in the most connected LSOA decile, whereas 26% are in the least connected decile. In London, the equivalent figures are 28% and 1%.

OCSI has also combined the Community Needs Index and Index of Multiple Deprivation (MHCLG 2019) to identify neighbourhoods suffering the dual disadvantage of deprivation/socio-economic challenges and lacking in the necessary community and civic assets, infrastructure, and investment to address these challenges. The 225 left behind areas (LBAs) are those that ranked in the bottom ten percent in both indices (OCSI 2020-2). England's 225 LBAs are home to 2.4 million people. They are predominantly located on the peripheries: former mining communities and council estates on the outskirts of post-industrial towns and cities in the North and Midlands, and communities along the North Sea coast. Coastal towns and cities are strongly represented in this group.

Research carried out by the OSCI and the Campaign for Better Transport (2021) found that the majority of LBAs suffer from limited public transport and low levels of car ownership. 40% of households in LBAs have no car, compared to 26% on average across the country. 50% of all rail stations in LBAs were closed by the Beeching cuts in the 1960s and 74% have no rail station compared to 60% pre-1960s. There is a higher reliance on bus services in these areas. However, over the previous six years, the total length of supported local bus routes declined by 35%, while commercial services declined by 11%. This has implications for access to services, people in LBAs having to travel two kilometres further to A&E hospitals than those living in other deprived areas. 34% have longer travel times by public transport to a hospital than average. It is important to note that there is variation in service deprivation within the largest coastal cities and that it is neighbourhoods in smaller towns in coastal and former industrial communities that record some of the longest travel times to key services.

OCSI has also drawn on data from OfCom and the Consumer Data Research Centre to identify those at risk of digital exclusion (OSCI 2020-1). This analysis found that broadband speeds in LBAs are above the average for England of 45.1 mbit/s. This may be related to the higher proportion of people in LBAs residing in urban areas (95.6%) compared with the national average (83.0%). However, a notably higher proportion of neighbourhoods in LBAs are categorised as "least engaged with the internet" compared

to the England average. Nearly 80% of LBAs are classified as “e-withdrawn” (non-internet users) or “passive and uncommitted users”. 43.4% of LBAs are e-withdrawn compared to 8.8% across England. Again, higher concentrations are found in smaller towns than in cities. The internet now enables everything we do, from online banking to buying essentials. It is increasingly difficult to access vital services, such as repeat prescriptions, GP appointments, applications for benefits or help with council tax, or payment for parking without access to the internet. Thus, digital exclusion is now a core determinant of social exclusion and one that requires a policy focus.

A hitherto unrecognised implication of digital inequality is the variation that exists between health and care systems with respect to digital maturity. A vast array of digital health technologies (DHTs) exists that can prevent ill-health, promote wellbeing and, by shifting the balance of care from expensive, reactive crisis management to prevention, early diagnosis and care within the home, help to put our health and care systems on a more sustainable footing.

Reflecting previous investment by NHS Digital that targeted resources at areas that were already judged to be ‘digitally mature’, some areas such as Greater Manchester and London are now galloping ahead with respect to their digital health ecosystems and, as such, attracting further investment from both Government and industry (Asthana, 2019). By contrast, hospitals on the periphery are overrepresented among those that do not even have comprehensive electronic patient records systems. While some of these use smaller-scale electronic systems in individual departments, several continue to rely on largely paper-based patient records. This is constraining their ability to both improve the productivity of hospital care and strengthen integrated care pathways with primary, community and social care providers. Given the crisis currently experienced by the NHS and social care, there is an urgent need to level up digital maturity.

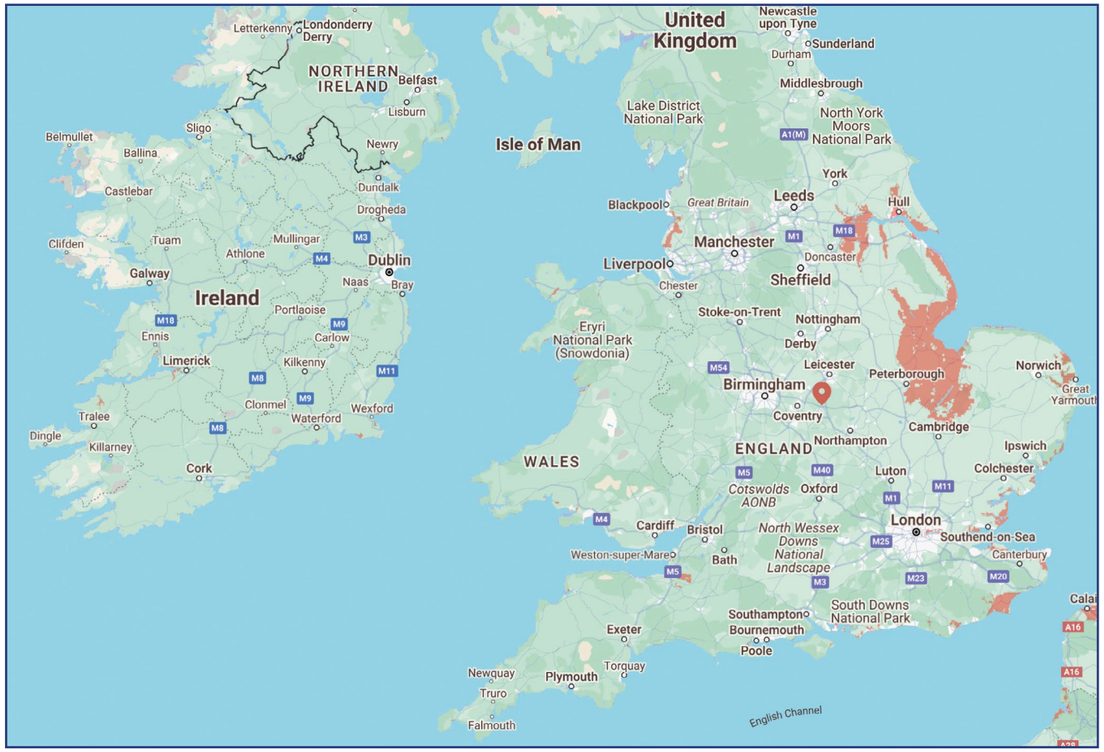
Health

Research published in the 2021 Chief Medical Officer’s (CMO) report showed that, compared to non-coastal areas, coastal communities in England have significantly worse health outcomes (Gibson and Asthana, 2021). The analysis mostly took place at Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA), not BUA level. BUA analysis of the Department of Health and Social Care’s Fingertips (public health profile) data shows a slight excess Quality and Outcome Framework (QOF) reported smoking prevalence (16.8% vs 16.1%) in coastal BUAs and a lower prevalence of obesity (7.0% vs 7.5%).

Rates of substance use are significantly higher on the coast and particularly in coastal towns. In 2022, the highest age standardised mortality rates (SMRs) for deaths related to drug poisoning were in Blackpool, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Carlisle, Barrow in Furness, Hull, Hastings, Copeland, Lincoln and Scarborough. The ten areas with the lowest SMRs were in London and the South East, rates ranging from 30 to 2.6 per 100,000 in Blackpool and Bexley respectively.

There is also a concern that coastal areas do not receive fair funding relative to their underlying health needs. Analysis by Health Education England for the 2021 CMO report (Matin et al, 2021) found that, although coastal communities have older, more deprived populations and suffering a greater prevalence of disease, they have fewer doctors and nurses per patient compared to the national average. Overall, coastal communities have 14.6% fewer postgraduate medical trainees, 15% fewer consultants and 7.4% fewer nurses per patient. The researchers also looked at ratios of patients to staff for particular specialities and found that, e.g.,

Figure 3.8: Risk of flooding for a water level of 0.5 metres above the high tide line (Source: coastal.climatecentral.org)



per patient with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), there are 22.1% fewer GP trainees, 10.5% fewer respiratory medicine trainees, 17.1% fewer respiratory medicine consultants and 9.4% fewer nurses in coastal communities. There is a strong evidence base of approaches to prevent and manage acute episodes of COPD that require hospitalisation and/or lead to respiratory failure (Halpin et al, 2017). Moreover, the UK continues to have significantly higher age-standardised death rates for respiratory disease than other Western countries, which cannot be explained by e.g., differences in smoking (Salsiccioli et al, 2018). It is therefore possible that the coastal excess in respiratory deaths (all ages) may be an indicator of inequalities in access to timely and effective care.

Climate change

Coastal cities are particularly vulnerable to environmental challenges such as climate change, rising sea level and coastal erosion. The UK’s Environment Agency (2020) identifies Hull as one of the most flood prone cities in the UK given that approximately 90% of the city lies below the high-tide line. According to the National Coastal Erosion Risk Mapping (Environment Agency, 2024), over 170,000 homes are at risk of flooding from rivers and coastal surges (see figure 3.8). Portsmouth is another coastal city that has been identified as being at greatest risk of sea level rise with 6,000 properties currently at risk of flooding (Environment Agency, 2024) and many more will be affected if sea levels rise by a projected 1.15 meters by 2100 (Betts, Brown and Pearson 2021). Other coastal cities at risk

of coastal flooding are Blackpool with 4,800 homes potentially affected, Liverpool with 9,000 at risk, Brighton and Hove with 10,000 homes at risk and Southampton with more than 27,000 at risk (NCERM, 2024). According to Climate Central's CoastalDEM digital model (2024), by 2050, sea levels around the English coast are forecast to be around 35cm higher, negatively impacting most medium, large and major coastal BUAs in English coastal cities, notably Great Yarmouth, Poole, Hull, Liverpool, Cardiff, Plymouth, Southampton, Portsmouth and Blackpool.

University expertise

All coastal cities in the Key Cities Innovation Network have universities which undertake research on the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental challenges facing Britain's coastal communities, including coastal cities. For example, with The Infrastructure for Ports and Coastal Towns and Cities Network (iPACT), Southampton University working in collaboration with Lancaster University, University of East Anglia and others are seeking to identify people-focused, infrastructure-based solutions to the complex problems of improving social wellbeing and prosperity in coastal communities through resilient and sustainable regeneration. In addition, Lancaster University is delivering research that seeks to enhance understanding of place attachment and sense of place amongst young people (Morecambe Bay Timescapes) as well as projects trialling gambling and opioid addiction interventions in Blackpool.

Plymouth University, established the first UK Centre for Coastal Communities and is currently leading and involved with several impactful externally-funded research projects including the design of a new coastal classification, the Entrepreneurial Futures Coastal Communities Project focusing on whether these environments are experiencing a funding bias, the FoodsEqual's Plymouth Fish Project and Stronger Shores which seeks to make coastlines and communities stronger in the face of flooding, erosion and the impacts of climate change. The Coastal Marine Applied Research (CMAR) group has undertaken several consultancy projects around sea level rise, coastal erosion and flooding, hosting one noteworthy project, SPLASH, which combines climate and wave data with AI to develop a more accurate way of forecasting coastal flooding. Additionally, Plymouth is home to the Plymouth Health Determinants Research Collaboration.

Lincoln University hosts the Lincoln Institute for Rural and Coastal Health conducting inter-disciplinary research to address the most challenging health issues within rural and coastal communities locally, nationally and internationally. Sunderland University has focused on coastal cultures, investigating the social and spatial impacts of culture regeneration on the city's cultural economy, communities, and the urban sense of place, capturing the lived experiences of communities formerly associated with coal mining along Seaham's coastline.

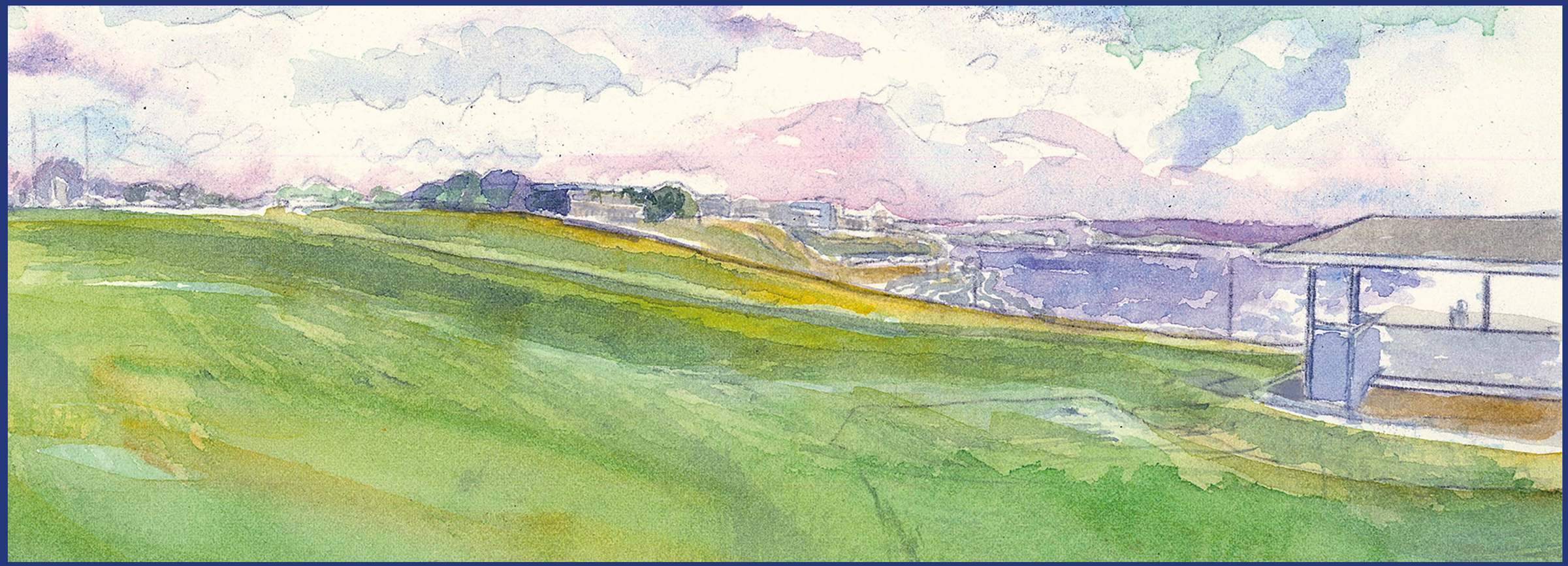
Essex University has established another Centre for Coastal Communities, with work focusing on adolescence and health in young adulthood, and the role of place on the mobility of young people in coastal towns. Additionally, the centre specialises in mental health determinants, needs, inequalities of care, and food insecurity and community supermarkets. Colleagues at Essex also have ongoing research projects focusing on coastal communities including the Coastal gap in equality for stroke care management (CoastGEM) and the Arise Initiative.

Meanwhile, the Southampton Marine and Maritime Institute (SMMI) acts as a point of focus for research in these areas at the University of Southampton, and has a dedicated special interest group for coastal communities as well as those in overlapping domains (Nature-Based Ocean Solutions, Ocean Justice, Digital Oceans and Ocean Energy). It is researchers from within these groups, and the broader SMMI membership who are driving much of a breadth of work spanning for example, offshore renewable energy, AI for shipping, ocean preservation and sustainability and ocean literacy, decarbonisation of ports and vessels, seaweed utilisation and the use of cultural assets to improve the health in young people. In addition, the University has a long history of significant research into UK coastal and environmental change. It works closely with the Channel Coastal Observatory and the National Oceanography Centre to both acquire and share data. This includes research into monitoring and change detection, coastal engineering, infrastructure security, coastal flooding risks and biodiversity.

Targeted intervention

Coastal cities are undoubtedly experiencing a wicked set of interlinked problems. Identifying appropriate points of 'entry' for intervention to address these challenges is problematic requiring targeted policy interventions focused on economic diversification, investment in infrastructure, and the improvement of social services. Coastal cities also need to harness opportunities for growth, particularly in emerging sectors such as renewable energy and green technologies, while developing sustainable tourism strategies that offer more stable employment. By tackling these deep-rooted problems, coastal cities can improve social mobility, reduce inequality, and build more resilient economies for the future.

Stakeholders



4 Voices from the periphery

Rebecca Smith MP

MP for South West Devon and co-chair of the Key Cities APPG

The lived experience and outlook of local communities are central to understanding policy challenges.

To help place that perspective at the centre of this review, I chaired a meeting of the Key Cities All-Party Parliamentary Group with a group of local stakeholders in Westminster on October 15, 2024 to discuss their experience.

Other Parliamentarians attending were my co-chair Rebecca Long-Bailey MP (Salford); Alison Hume MP (Scarborough & Whitby), who chairs the Coastal Communities APPG; Amanda Martin MP (Portsmouth North); Tristan Osborne MP (Chatham & Aylesford); Darren Paffey MP (Southampton Itchen); and Vicki Slade MP (Mid Dorset & North Poole).

Submissions

We heard submissions from five stakeholder representatives: Dr Andy Knox MBE, a GP in Morecambe Bay who also serves as associate medical director for population health across the Lancashire and South Cumbria region; Professor Judah Armani, head of the Social Impact Challenge Lab at the Royal College of Art, who has worked with young ex-prisoners in Poole; Capt. Richard Allan, AFNI, Harbour Master and CEO of Cattewater Harbour; Thea Behrman, artistic director and CEO of the Estuary Festival in Essex and Kent; and Elaine Hayes, the inaugural CEO of the UK's first National Marine Park at Plymouth Sound.

Community health

In his evidence, Dr Knox highlighted the severe health and socio-economic challenges in Lancashire and South Cumbria's coastal communities. Chronic illnesses, mental health issues, and poor housing are prevalent, with Blackpool notably suffering the worst health outcomes in England. He critiqued current healthcare and socio-economic models, advocating community-centred approaches to address inequality and pointing to successful initiatives like the Population Health Equity Leadership Academy and community-driven mental health programmes as showcasing potential solutions. Dr Knox emphasised collaboration with communities, government, and industries to create sustainable, locally-tailored solutions that address systemic challenges, regenerate coastal areas, and improve health and well-being while aligning with climate and social justice goals.

Inclusion and rehabilitation

Prof. Judah Armani discussed the systemic barriers faced by young ex-prisoners in Poole, Dorset, emphasising the need for societal redesign to foster respect and agency. He questioned traditional pathways to respect—achievement, self-sufficiency, and altruism—as often out of reach for those in challenging circumstances. Prof. Armani called for reimagined services that empower rather than foster dependency, advocating co-designed, community-centred solutions. His work underlines the value of meaningful engagement, human-centred design, and opportunities for ex-prisoners to give back. By addressing interconnected systemic issues, Armani advocates fostering societal inclusion and leveraging untapped skills to create pathways for self-support and meaningful contributions, aiding community resilience and growth.

Port communities

The role of ports as economic and community hubs, fostering jobs, infrastructure, and sustainability, were highlighted in the submission by Capt. Richard Allan. Trust ports like Cattewater Harbour reinvest profits locally, supporting green initiatives like hydrogen-powered vessels and offshore renewables. Challenges include outdated infrastructure, limited shore power capacity, and balancing port needs with urban development. Capt. Allan stressed the importance of community engagement through education and skills training, particularly in maritime and green technologies. He urged collaboration between government, industry, and communities to future-proof ports, align with net-zero goals, and drive regional regeneration while addressing environmental and spatial constraints for long-term sustainability and economic resilience.

Arts and culture

Thea Behrman highlighted the value of arts and culture in engaging local communities and in building skills, capacity and sustainability. The Estuary Festival connects Thames Estuary communities through arts, celebrating their heritage and addressing social challenges. Projects like Mudwalks and The People of 1381 combine environmental themes with local narratives to foster engagement and address health inequalities. The festival supports skill-building, especially for young people, while promoting inclusion through initiatives like This Is Us. The 2025 festival will focus on "vessels" as carriers of stories and climate initiatives. Supported by Arts Council England, Estuary Festival serves as a model for creative partnerships that inform sustainable community development, reconnect residents with coastal spaces, and inspire resilience through art and culture.

Empowering local communities

Elaine Hayes outlined the approach of the Plymouth Sound National Marine Park to reconnecting coastal communities with the sea and addressing ecological and social challenges. The Marine Park addresses health and socio-economic disparities, promoting swimming programmes, literacy initiatives, and mental health projects linked to "blue spaces". Community engagement highlights barriers like intergenerational poverty and data access. Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Horizons Award, the park fosters inclusive approaches to education, jobs, and sustainability. Hayes sees the potential of National Marine Parks as grassroots tools for ecological stewardship and economic regeneration, aligning with net-zero goals while empowering communities to shape healthier, more resilient futures connected to their coastal heritage.

Discussion

The stakeholders had provided a wide-ranging and extremely valuable insight into the realities, good and bad, experienced by local communities, and APPG members explored the policy implications in a wide-ranging discussion.

There's broad consensus around some of the issues: transport, skills, jobs, health and climate change. There's agreement too

around certain less tangible factors: the absence of hope, lack of opportunity – or access to opportunities that are there – the need to relearn what we have forgotten in terms of our connection with the sea and looking after natural resources.

Alison Hume MP spoke of children in Scarborough who have never swum in the sea and a wider context of an ageing population with services being stripped away. She highlighted the costs of using public transport in remote areas and underlined the importance of thinking holistically about the challenges facing coastal communities.

The problems around transport in the north are well known and relevant here, with Barrow sometimes described as at the end of the longest cul-de-sac in England and a similar situation in Scarborough. It's notable though that peripheral areas in north and south share many challenges, with a similar situation in Devon and Cornwall.

The crucial role of transport in encouraging economic development and aspirations was picked up by Tristan Osborne MP, noting that the negative indicators reported for coastal communities generally were less reflective of the experience in his Chatham and Aylesford constituency, with its excellent high-speed rail connections.

Southampton and Portsmouth likewise are well connected by transport links, but Portsmouth North MP Amanda Martin echoed the point made by Alison Hume, highlighting affordability and confidence in a complex set of interlinked factors that need a holistic approach. Southampton City Council leader Cllr Lorna Fielker pointed to the disconnect between jobs and local people in terms of skills and lack of suitable pathways.

That dilemma was further explored by Southampton Itchen MP Darren Paffey, who pointed to the difficulty of getting jobs and opportunities to local people when companies come to the area because there is a supply chain or a relevant expertise. One of the challenges around Freeports is that without an effective local engagement strategy they could almost pass the local community by. Jobs in ports, with the cruise industry and related maritime sectors are often behind walls and gates in a privately-owned dockyard. Enabling local children to meet the teams, see the opportunities, know there could be jobs there for them in five or ten years' time requires access that will not happen by itself.

From my perspective in Plymouth and South West Devon I noted that while we could see many similarities between the peripheral areas in the south and the north of the country, what really stood out is that so much Government policy is made in silos, with little read-across to the impacts in other areas. Joining the dots should be one of the top priorities. The Green Book inequity, if the Treasury is completely geared around the 360 degree model, is a systemic issue which we need to see change. The economic opportunities, the jobs and what we do with transport are all crucial, but the hope piece is is also key to the future – we are still the places where people want to come and live, because the sea pulls people to it.

The policy discussion was summarised by Salford MP – and APPG co-chair – Rebecca Long-Bailey. Some shortcomings stand out in the narratives, including the need for better cross-Government coordination in dealing with coastal communities, and the systemic problems around the criteria used for public investment in our coastal areas. Rebecca highlighted Cattewater Harbour's Trust model described by Capt. Allan as something that ties closely with the longstanding Key Cities interest in community wealth building as a way of building local resilience and addressing deprivation by working with anchor institutions to drive local investment, skills and jobs. A similar approach was found in Professor Armani's emphasis on rebuilding through codesigning solutions with local people. The effectivess of blue over green in tackling mental health, as described by Plymouth Sound's Elaine Hayes, has relevance also to how non-coastal local authorities can better support deprived children.

The overarching lesson, as outlined by Dr Knox, is that all roads lead back to poverty. The crises we have seen in our coastal communities stem from poverty, poor housing, lack of skills, from the absence of an industrial strategy that recognises the particular weaknesses that need to be addressed in our regions, cities and towns, particularly where places have been deindustrialised and where there is an overreliance on a single industry or employer.

Community is at the heart of this and Thea Behrman's evidence highlighted the importance of social history in our coastal communities, understanding that the challenges people face now have parallels in times gone by. Art and culture, so often seen as the preserve of a wealthy elite, is about community, about people's feelings and understanding of the world around them. It has an important part to play in giving local people the agency they need to see a better future.

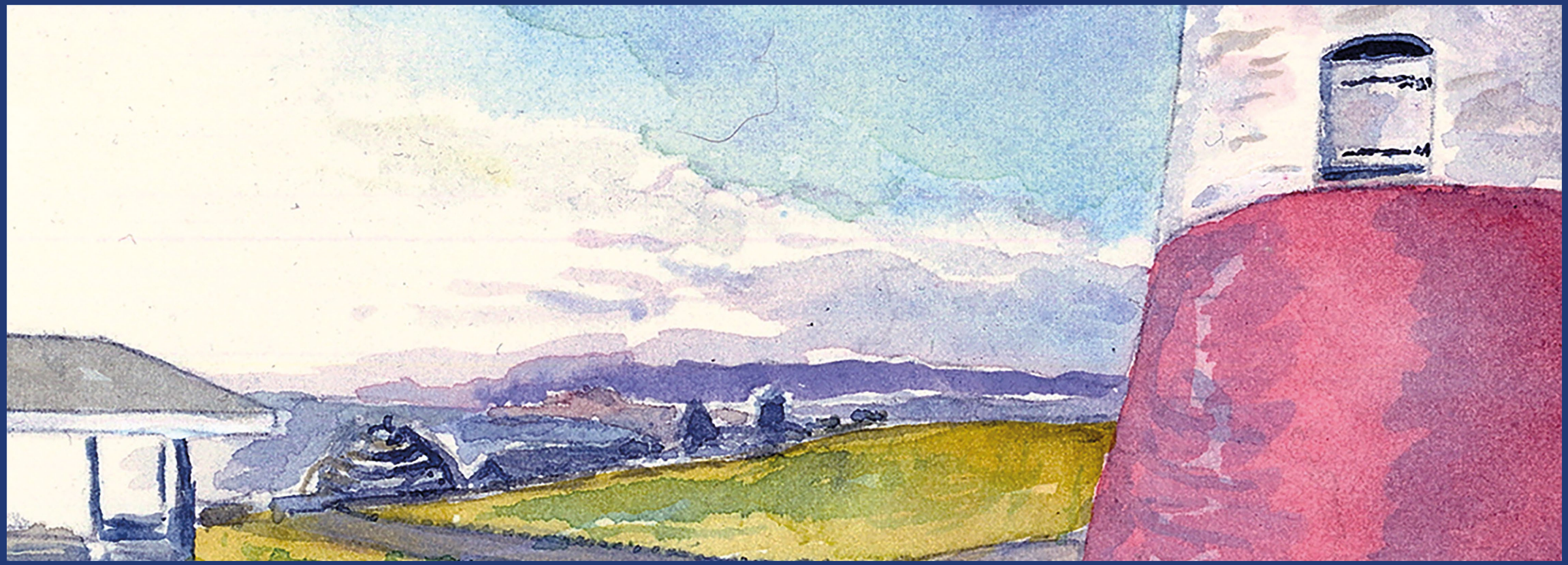
Stakeholder cooperation

Among other important submissions received following our meeting was a paper by Dr Toby Roberts, Jennifer Knight and Professor William Powrie of the University of Southampton, on the crucial role of stakeholder cooperation in developing port cities sustainably. In their submission, the team explores challenges in port cities and stresses the need for cooperation between port and city authorities.

Demaritimisation has disconnected communities from the benefits of ports, leaving them with pollution and declining local employment. Southampton's inaugural port-city forum showcased improved relationships among stakeholders, fostering initiatives like maritime heritage trails and renewable energy projects. The study highlights the unique potential of ports to drive sustainability through circular economies and renewable energy while addressing barriers to collaboration. Annual forums are recommended to build partnerships, align sustainability goals, and develop actionable plans for inclusive and environmentally conscious port-city development and regeneration.

All the above submissions are included in full in the Appendix.

Conclusions



5 Conclusions

There is a good news story to be found in these pages for coastal communities.

Places like Sunderland, Hull and Lincoln, Carlisle, Lancaster, Preston, Newport, Exeter, Plymouth, Bournemouth, Portsmouth, Southampton, Medway and Norwich are engines of creativity and growth, offering huge potential for wider investment in their coastal areas, ports and coastal hinterlands, building on existing and residual strengths.

The coast has a major part to play in renewable electricity generation and in trade with our neighbours and the wider world. Our coastline is awash with areas of outstanding natural beauty and sites of special scientific interest, making it not only inspiring to live there, but ideal for innovation to tackle the challenges we face, from coastal erosion and flooding to transforming public services and co-designing novel approaches with local communities.

But we will only get there if our disadvantaged coastal communities are seen as part of the solution. The disparities – in health outcomes, educational attainment, skills, child poverty, economic output and productivity – are too stark to ignore. Government efforts to stem half a century of coastal decline have failed – relative deprivation continues to grow. The resulting credibility gap is so entrenched that national programmes to drive economic growth, improve public services and address digital exclusion – even if they ultimately deliver benefits to the coast – will do little to fix the alienation that undermines social cohesion and hinders equitable development.

Turning this round means giving our coastal communities agency in their future, and a programme to empower, protect, connect and invest in them.

There is a way to turn this round, but it requires an express focus on coastal communities in which they have agency, and a dedicated programme of coastal regeneration built around empowering, protecting and connecting our coastal communities, and investing in infrastructure, growth, public services and innovation with our universities, our creative industries and the knowledge of those who live there.

Building on the insights of numerous others over the last decade and more, the 28 recommendations in this report offer a framework for such a programme.

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Appendix

A selection of evidence submitted or presented in response to the Key Cities APPG's call for evidence.

Stakeholder perspectives

1 COMMUNITY HOLDS THE KEY TO PROGRESS

Dr Andy Knox MBE

A GP in Morecambe Bay, Dr Andy Knox also serves as associate medical director for population health across the Lancashire and South Cumbria region. His role as a leading figure in developing Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board's (ICB) population health model and in launching the population health equity leadership academy in 2022 was recognised with an MBE in the first birthday honours list of the new King's reign.

It is staggering that the places that should potentially be the healthiest in the country in terms of clean air and opportunities for health, are actually suffering the worst health.

The economist Mariana Mazzucato says society is a manifestation of our values and who or what we love. I recently wrote a book called Sick Society, in which I tried to reimagine how we can live well together. Part of what we see in coastal communities is that they have been horrendously forgotten and under-invested in.

In the huge coast area from Blackpool right up through Fleetwood, Heysham, Morecambe, through into Morecambe Bay and then Barrow, where we build the submarines, there are staggering inequalities. Blackpool is currently the poorest town in England, with the lowest healthy life expectancy in the country. People develop major chronic illnesses in their mid-forties and there is a 15-17-year gap in life expectancy between Blackpool and just a few miles inland. People are getting into poor health much earlier in life. Blackpool has some of the worst rates of heart disease and COPD, and 22% of the adult population suffers with depression. So we have major chronic ill health, and we can see that expanding by 14-20% over the next decade.

When we look at models of healthcare and redesigning systems, the new hospitals programme that's happening across Lancashire and South Cumbria will result in 300 fewer beds than we have now, when the prediction is that with rising chronic ill health we are going to need 500 more than we currently have.

We have to really understand what it is that communities experience and what they need. There's a brilliant thinker at Harvard, Otto Scharmer, who talks about Theory U, learning from the future. We are at an absolute precipice when it comes to health and mental health in this country right now. We have the lowest rates of satisfaction with the NHS. We have the highest staff burnout rates. We have a widening health inequity gap, which is particularly acute in our coastal communities. The truth is that if we continue with the current model, we're on a hiding to nothing.

We have to recognise the moment we find ourselves in, have the humility to let go of the way that we keep delivering things, to listen, to let go, to suspend what we think we know about what the answers are, to embrace complex, adaptive thinking and to recognise that only together with our communities are we going to be able to meet the challenges they are facing. If you consider the lack of transport infrastructure, the lack of jobs – we have the worst educational attainment in our coastal communities. Blackpool may be literally bottom of the country, but if you follow that right around the coast, it's the same story everywhere. And yet we have Ofsted judgments that say to schools that they are failing, but if you listen to head teachers in our coastal communities, they say the truth is that they have to make sure the kids are fed and that they have clothes and that the safeguarding is taken care of and their wellbeing is attended to before they can even think about educating them – and then we stigmatise them for being lazy or feckless, for not pulling themselves up by their bootstraps or not getting into work.

"We have a widening health inequity gap, particularly acute in coastal communities. If we continue with the current model, we're on a hiding to nothing."

Only 65% of the Blackpool population is currently in work, which is 10% below the average in England. But there are no jobs and there is no transport infrastructure for people to get to jobs, and they do not have got the educational attainment to get into good quality jobs. And yet that stigma is so big in our communities that we're naming and shaming and blaming communities rather than having the humility to ask better questions about what's really going on.

How have you been so forgotten and left behind? How can we begin to work with you to do something beautiful and brilliant in these communities that aligns with climate change and with green technology, that aligns with the huge possibilities of the creative arts? Morecambe used to be called the West End because Edward Elgar wrote most of his concertos in its parish church. There was an incredible sense of creativity and the arts and yet, with the decline of the seaside industry and people holidaying in our coastal communities, we've been left devastated.

Where we are now is that if you leave prison in Manchester, you will get adverts suggesting you go and live in Blackpool or Morecambe because the housing is super cheap and there are loads of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). But in our HMOs, we then see a huge rise of gang issues, cuckooing and we see our young people drawn into this, because there's a sense of hopelessness. That's why we've got drugs and drink 10-15% higher than the rest of the country. So we have some really big issues.

In Blackpool we have three times as many kids in care than the average in England. We have the highest population of under-fives. We have really low attainment scores. Eleven percent of our under-18s are not in education, employment or training. We have terrible housing conditions.

In our private rented sector 76% of the housing is either damp or/and moulding, so we have a massive outbreak of respiratory disease, because the people are living in squalor. And then we saying, well, 20% of them smoke. They are living with mental health issues and with hopelessness, so rather than stigmatising them for smoking, it would be more interesting to understand the reasons. Adverse childhood experiences and childhood trauma are rife in communities where there is hopelessness and job-

lessness, and we see a much higher level of hospital admissions from disadvantaged communities.

Professor Ian Sinha, from Alder Hey Children's Hospital visited Barrow recently and looked at one of the housing blocks. He was shocked by the conditions, including widespread pigeon infestations. Prof. Sinha said that children are now at high risk of being admitted to hospital with conditions like histoplasmosis, cryptococcosis, and psittacosis. These are unbelievably dangerous lung infections for young children to get, and yet we are seeing this in our hospital wards because of infestations in housing.

There is a lot of hope in coastal communities and a wonderful community spirit. In the area from Blackpool to Fleetwood, in Morecambe, Barrow and Heysham, there are great opportunities for change. We run a Population Health and Health Equity Leadership Academy. As leaders, we have to know how to work in complex adaptive systems. We have to have the humility to know how to listen and work with the community. It is important to raise the profile of leadership within coastal communities of people who know how to work effectively with those communities. This is key to learning how to shift the dial on some of these issues with methodologies that work with community power, so that communities themselves come up with the solutions, co-creating and co-designing those solutions with us.

What is needed is fresh vision and clarity about the destination we want to get to, understanding the rules of the games and the rules we need to let go of that are stopping us getting there, and then the freedom to innovate.

Eden Project North is being developed in Morecambe and we're exploring a whole new curriculum based around climate justice and social justice. What if we were training our kids in the subjects they actually need rather than an education system that's completely stuck in the post-industrial era and doesn't get them ready for the real world they're going to be living in?

In Fleetwood we've seen phenomenal community-led initiatives around mental health, where we've cut waiting lists by 50% in the last year simply by listening to communities differently and working with them.

There are opportunities to collaborate with big companies joining forces and taking responsibility to economically regenerate this area, rather than just taking the resources and selling them elsewhere.

The question is: how do we get into a real process of coastal community regeneration that is led by our communities and backed by government to rediscover the value of the people, the communities and the opportunities here?

2 EX-PRISONERS IN POOLE, DORSET

Prof. Judah Armani

Hoda Judah Armani, head of the Social Impact Challenge Lab at the Royal College of Art and director of Public Service design consultancy, has pioneered new ways in which service design practice and education can be deployed to transform the lives and education of serving prisoners. He established InHouse Records, a fully functioning record label operating in seven UK and three USA prisons, along with Aux Magazine, an educational publication distributed in 48 prisons in the UK and USA.

Over 10,000 learners in prisons have been through the InHouse programme and many of its alumni are now employed in creative occupations at InHouse, at Aux Magazine, and with industry partners. InHouse programme alumni have a re-offending rate of less than one percent.

In his response to the Key Cities APPG's call for evidence from stakeholders, Judah has conducted a series of interviews with former prison inmates drawn from coastal communities through the Probation Service in Poole, Dorset.

The people I've spoken to are from challenging backgrounds and have gone through prison, probation or usually both.

The reason we've spoken to them is because they generally cut an arc across all our societal services, our culture and our engagement with how we do society. So while they might present more extreme narratives, you'd probably find most of these narratives in some form across other groups with challenging circumstances in our society.

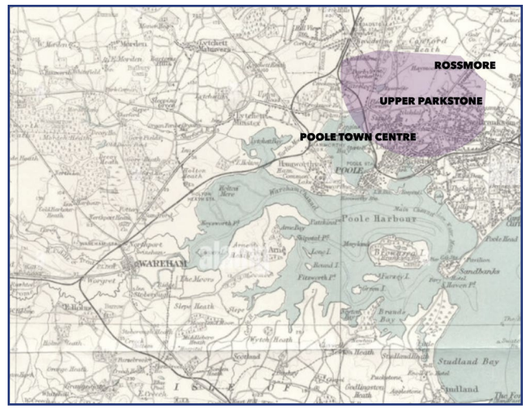
Why am I engaged with this as a designer?

We're all involved in making design choices every day. We all need to make sense of things to make stuff, and that hasn't changed since Socrates. When we design a table, who it is for? An adult? A child? For outside or inside? Is it going to be made from metal? And when we've worked all that out, we make it.

When we're designing or redesigning services for society, our materials aren't wood, metal or plastic, but people. We need to understand the tolerances of the communities and people we're designing for if we want those services to last, otherwise we're blindly making things in silos.

People in coastal communities and those who work with them are quite particular. Edges bring out interesting narratives in humans. Why do we go there, what are we attracted to? There's something about the challenges and the fuel mixture that's a feature of working with coastal communities which is about innovation, about use of space and resources. There's energy in going to the edge.

Figure A2.1: Rossmoor, Upper Parkstone and Poole Town Centre



The people I've spoken to are in those areas, as I mentioned, in Poole – specifically in Rossmoor, Upper Parkstone and Poole Town Centre (see Figure A2.1).

These (Figure A2.2) are four of the young men I spoke to, representing a range of those who are on probation there. All are somewhere on the neurodiverse spectrum, and all are connecting with a range of public ser-

Figure A2.2: A range of young men on probation were interviewed.

"Humanity, man – humans have lost their humanity. As for society as a whole, I think it's very difficult to engage. It's changing all the time, there's a lot of hate. There's a lot of people so quick to judge and not quick enough to listen…"

"For how the future looks, I see myself helping out people, being of service to the community."

"Engaging in society can be challenging at times, as I'm an ex-prisoner and I find it hard to adapt into the public. The future for me is to be a decent citizen in society and to give back as I've taken from society, and to excel my music career step by step."

"It's too easy. It's too easy to jump on a bandwagon. It's too easy to believe the wrong thing, you know?"

"I think for me, it is easy to engage in society. However, it's slightly harder to engage in the culture that society is involved in, because it's very much a cyber world that we're in, you know, social media, keeping up with the Joneses, as you put, so I think for me that is the hardest thing, engaging in the culture that society is in, because it's very hard to keep up."

"I plan on utilizing all my skills to make a better life for me and my family, so the future is bright for me."

vices. This is what we look at as a complex challenge.

When we're making something for society, there is complexity built in. The relationships of the people involved are very intertwined. You cannot exclude any group. We cannot look at how we might be able to support people in challenging circumstances without also understanding those who are not in challenging circumstances, because they cut an arc through society. They're diverse, because it's not just relationships between people, but between people and systems, people and services, between systems and even systems of systems. They're dynamic in that they adapt. If we do nothing, they will still develop. Our challenge is understanding the tempo of development and go faster, to intervene in a way that is meaningful. To do that, we need to do more understand just one group of people.

There are some insights drawn from this that revolve around two areas – one around respect as a cultural phenomenon, and the other around services, which is more systemic (see Figure A2.3).

Respect is challenging, because culturally we've made it difficult to access. Usually, there are three ways we can get it, by achieving something, by studying, or by getting a job. We achieve something that society recognises, or we become self-sufficient and don't need to rely on anyone else for support or help. Or we do what gets the most respect – helping others, through charity and philanthropy.

All these routes are out of reach for people in challenging situations, and not just those who've just left prison. It's hard to get respect for an achievement if you've never had that, if you have failed school or school has failed you, and if you've never been able to get a job. It's hard to get the respect of self-sufficiency if you're having to dock into a range of public services, and it's hard to get respect if you are constantly being handed things.

So we need to reimagine what respect looks like, re-explore what achievement looks like. We need new ways of understanding what that is. Many of those I've worked with have gone to prison for selling drugs. They understand product, stock, supply and demand – for all the wrong reasons, but they understand it nevertheless. So in terms of understanding achievement, that might mean they can start at +2 instead of -5.

"We need to provide space for those in challenging situations to negotiate the terms of their support so they have a stake in it."

We also need to reimagine what self-support looks like, to provide space for those in challenging situations to negotiate the terms of their own support so that they have a stake in what that looks like, rather than making themselves vulnerable to the five or so strangers they're having to connect to in their lives. The opportunity to give back in meaningful ways becomes quite important for everybody who is in challenging circumstances. How can I help others, even though I'm in challenging circumstances myself?

The act of choosing reminds us we're human. Giving people the opportunity to feel more human and to be able to give – even if it's their time to others – is hugely valuable.

The final thing is around how we reimagine services (see Figure A2.4). We need to be aware that the more services we create, the more opportunities we have of people becoming dependent on them and the less

Figure A2.3: Cultural and systemic insights around respect and services.

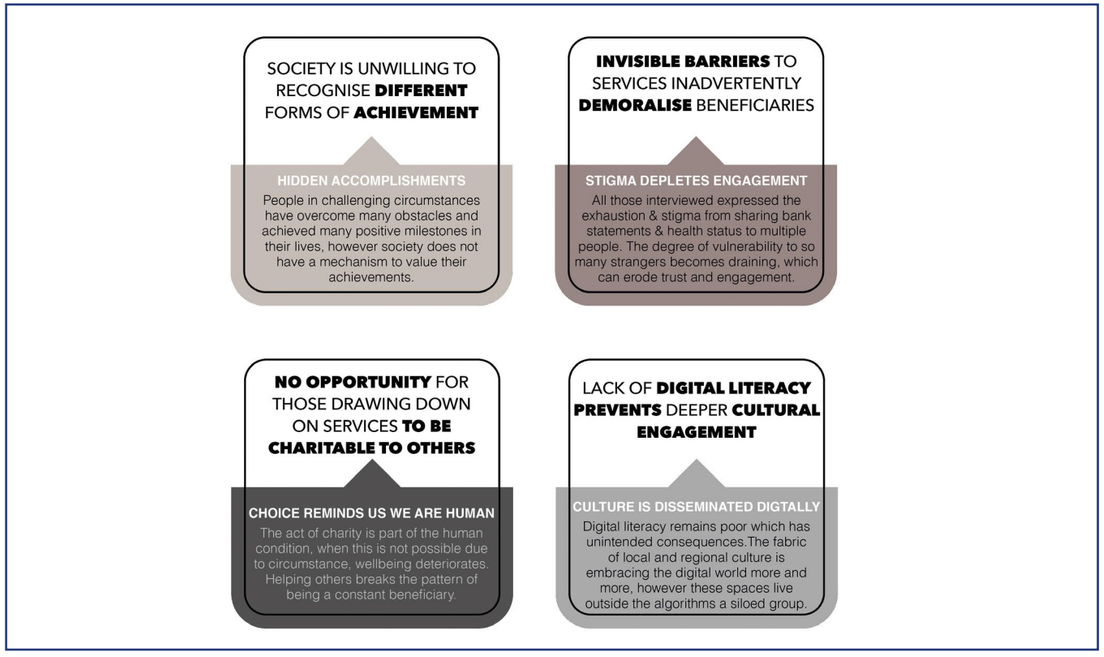
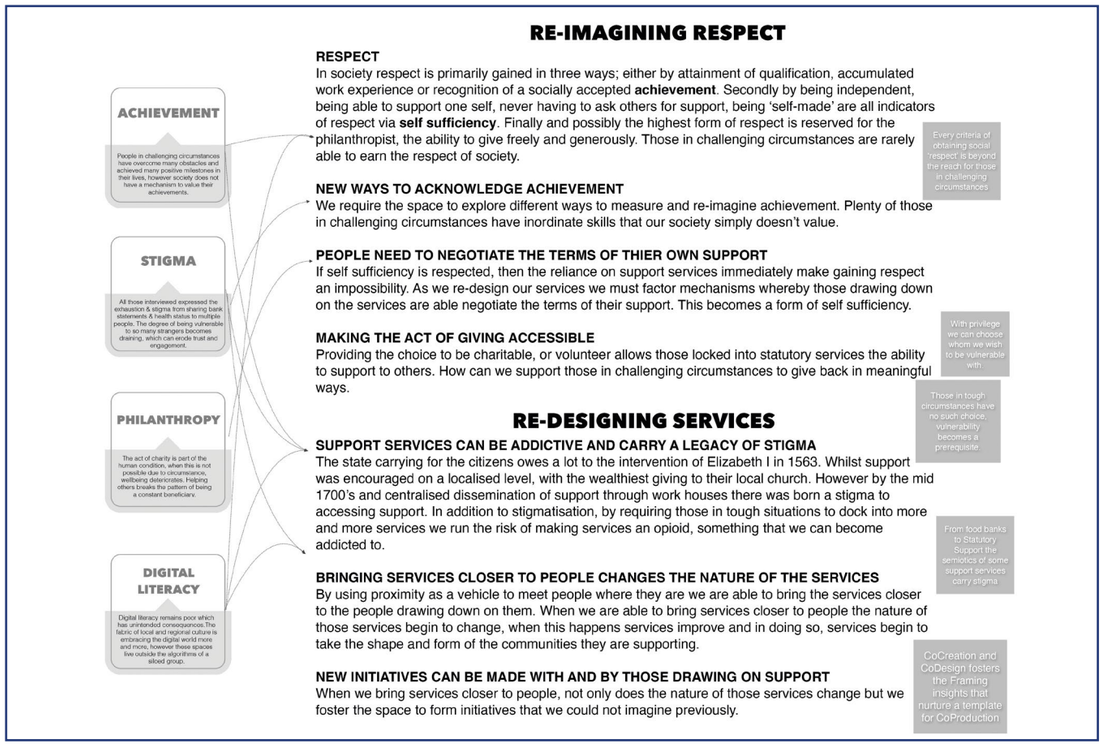


Figure A2.4: Reimaging social attitudes and public services to improve outcomes.



we're able to promote agency in people's lives. That too isn't just for those in challenging situations, it's for all of us. Our 21st century way is going more and more towards apps and ways to interact digitally. The more we plug into services, the less we're creating choice in our life, and the less that makes us feel like humans. We need to look afresh at what services we provide and how we can do that in more careful ways, bringing services closer to people on a human level.

In the work I've been doing with the Ministry of Justice over the last six years on place-based probation, we are seeing the nature of those services change completely by bringing them closer to other people. When we make things together with others, the things we make become stronger and better, and that is part of asset-based community development, and of how we engage in co-creative ways.

Summary

This project has been undertaken across an intense but short period in the areas of Poole Town Centre, Upper Parkstone and Rossmore, where coastal residents who are all on probation were interviewed. The process of the interviews was conversational and informal, intended primarily to support the individual in making sense of their own pathway. The insights shared in the context of this review were secondary outcomes.

Designing with society is rarely about generating singular innovative solutions and more about exploring approaches to challenging scenarios. These scenarios are complex because they are interdependent, with many different people and groups connected through a variety of different relationships. The interdependent relationships that run across society make it impossible to exclude any stakeholder group.

These relationships also run across systems, networks and services, making the complexity diverse as well as interdependent. This interdependence and diversity foster dynamism, setting a tempo by which these complex challenges evolve. Singular solutions therefore merely provide short-term solutions at best. Framing a portfolio of approaches, however, offers a way of navigating adaptive responses.

There are two framing approaches that can usefully be explored further in the context of this review – Re-imagining Respect and Re-designing Services. While this framing is not exhaustive, the lengthy conversations that have been captured suggest this approach has validity both in origin and in potential outcomes.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that privilege increases choice – the choice of where to live, what to eat and, in the context of this project, who to share personal information with. For those in challenging circumstances, vulnerability is the precondition for receiving support and this makes meaningful engagement harder. In developing solutions we must be mindful the more support we create, the more we increase dependence on services. Great care must be taken to design meaningful support that also fosters personal agency.

3 PORTS AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Capt. Richard Allan, AFNI

Richard Allan joined the Cattewater Harbour Commissioners as Deputy Harbour Master in 2017 following a successful career at sea as a Master Mariner, becoming Harbour Master and CEO in 2020.

Ports are not just places where ships dock, and where cargo is loaded and unloaded. They are gateways to prosperity, hubs of economic activity, and engines of social progress. They contribute to the growth and well-being of our communities in numerous ways.

There are four types of ports serving our island nation, and 95% of all goods arrive in the country via shipping, facilitated by our ports.

When looking at ports it is important to be aware of their set up. There are private ports – PD Ports, ABP, Southampton are examples. Then there are MOD ports, like Clyde and Devonport. Local authority-run ports include Salcombe and Portsmouth. And finally there are Trust ports, of which my port, Cattewater Harbour at Plymouth, is one.

Cattewater was established by Act of Parliament and is overseen by a Board of Commissioners known as the duty holders. Our sole aim is to improve the port and the community for the benefit of our stakeholders. We don't have shareholders. Profits are reinvested in the ports to enable growth, support projects and engage with the community. Other examples of large Trust ports are the Port of London and Harwich.

First and foremost, ports facilitate and drive economic growth. They handle the import and export of goods, which are the lifeblood of trade. From local businesses to multinational corporations, companies rely on ports to move products and raw materials efficiently. This flow of goods creates jobs — not just at the port itself, but throughout the supply chain (see Figure A3.1)

From truck drivers to warehouse workers, shipping agents to chandlers, freight operators to logistics experts, the job opportunities generated by port activities are vast. These jobs provide stable incomes for thousands of families in the community, helping to reduce unemployment and improve overall living standards.

But of course the impact is much wider than direct employment. Recent British Ports Association (BPA) statistics show that every direct job in the port supports 6½ jobs indirectly. A busy port often attracts investment. An example close to us is the freeport which we hope will foster further economic development locally, diversifying the local economy and strengthening economic resilience of the community (see Figure A3.2).

In addition to economic impact, ports also play a key role in the development of community infrastructure. When a port grows, so does the need for roads, railways, and communication networks that connect the port to the rest of the region. Such infrastructure projects, often jointly funded by the public and private sectors, bring modern facilities and services to the community.

Better infrastructure not only enhances transportation efficiency, it also improves access to essential services like healthcare, education, and emergency response.

Although our own ports infrastructure is fit for purpose and has served us well, it is now also in desperate need of investment. The facilities need to be future-proofed and

Figure A3.1: Catalyst for growth (Mott McDonald, 2024).

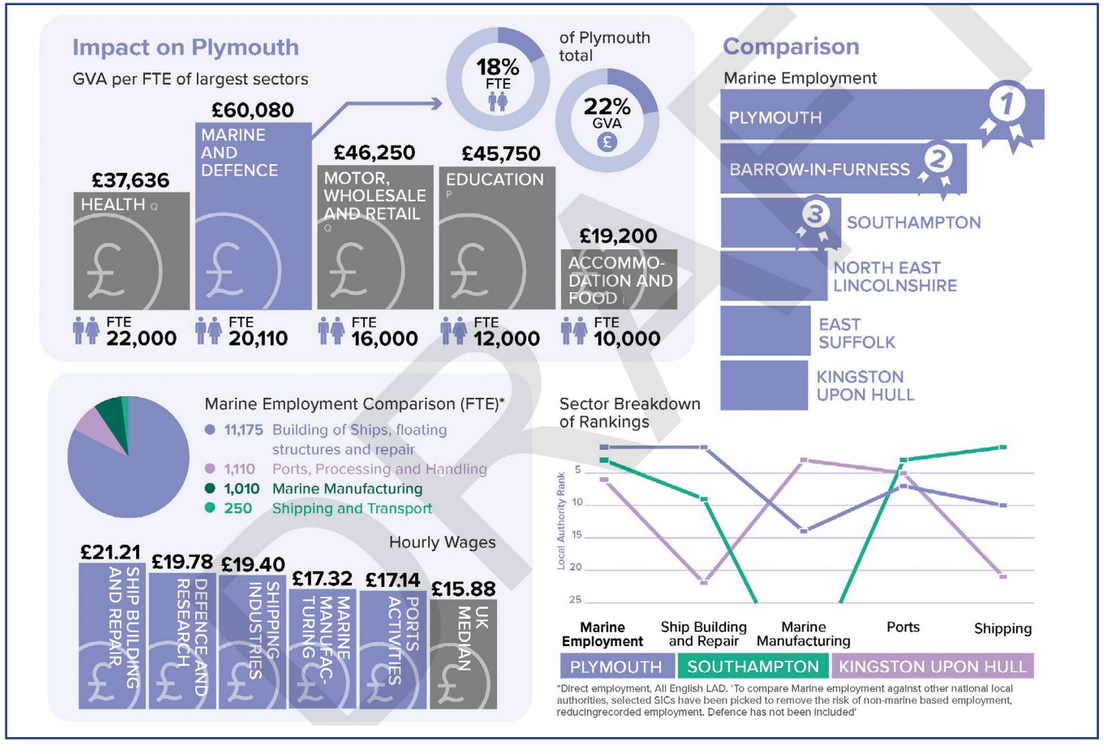
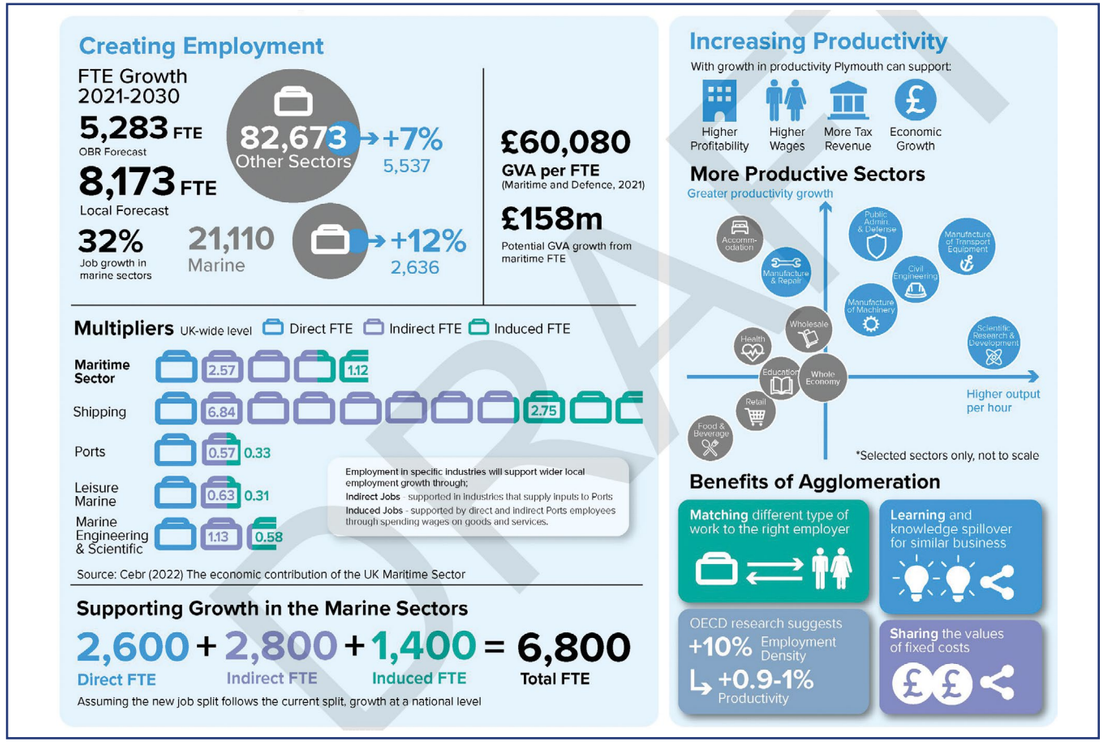


Figure A3.2: Economic impact (Mott McDonald, 2024).



decarbonised in anticipation of future legislation around Net Zero ports. The scale of investment required to support maritime of the future and ensure we are not left behind is considerable. Major ports in the EU and elsewhere have invested heavily and there is a real concern that the South West of England will again be left behind.

We have recently completed a UKSPF feasibility study at Cattewater Harbour to look at a new facility in an area adjacent to a commercial wharf. Clear of the navigable channel, this multiuse facility could accommodate larger ships, provide more cargo storage, diversify the cargo such as container discharge, and provide valuable space to support renewables. Renewables is an exciting opportunity for the South West, especially if the Celtic Sea can play its full part in meeting the UK wind targets.

My Board and Stakeholders – of which the Local Authority is one – are well aware that we are lagging twenty years behind others, but luckily we are still on that curve and we now have the opportunity to invest in the port, which in turn means investing in the city and the region, resulting in a skilled work force, high value jobs, technical green jobs, and a considerable rise in supply chain opportunities.

Community engagement is something we take seriously and enjoy. Apart from our port user groups and statutory engagements, we also have a brilliant schools and university engagement programme. School visits, which happen every other Thursday in term time, involve a meet-the-team session, a visit to the harbour vessels, and seeing examples of the cargo that comes in and out of the port, all set out on a large world map to reinforce geographic understanding. After lunch, the students embark on a boat trip around the port, visiting the commercial wharves and seeing the ships and trade, before heading out to enjoy the wider delights of Plymouth Sound.

Through this programme, we've had students joining us as marine apprentices with some now fully employed by the port, working on the water.

There is widespread desire to have more high-value jobs. If you work in the maritime sector, data shows that the wage is generally 40% higher than the average wage of the surrounding area.

Skills – specifically marine-related skills and green jobs linked to maritime and marine tech – is a key growth area, and I am proud Plymouth is leading the way in this, both through the University of Plymouth and through local apprenticeship providers. The quality of the offer is underlined by the fact that Port of London Authority, Uber Boats and Thames Clippers staff are all trained in Plymouth.

Sustainability is becoming an increasingly important focus for modern ports. Many are adopting green initiatives to minimize their carbon footprint, for example by investing in cleaner technologies and reducing emissions from vessels and port equipment. In Plymouth, port machinery and vessels are already using hydrogen systems to ensure that engines are burning cleaner. Plymouth is the home of Maritime Autonomy and supports a wide range of vessels pushing the boundaries of innovation in technology and clean fuels.

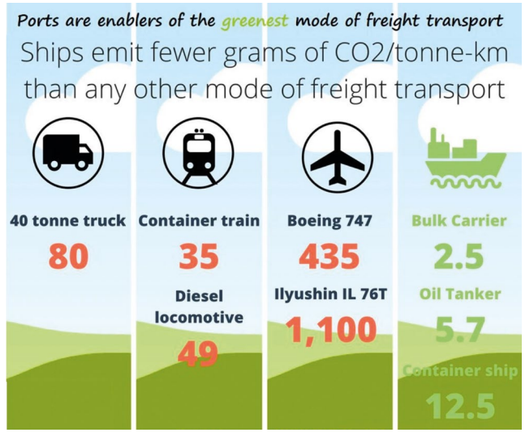
On a recent visit to Plymouth, the DfT Director of Maritime, Lola Fadina, was able to witness the arrival of a new vessel powered by Cryogenic Hydrogen – a development funded by the Government's Clean Maritime Demonstration Competition (CMDC).

Ports that embrace sustainability show how industry and environmental stewardship can coexist. Where capacity exists, this will include shore power, but the wider-arching 'Net Zero ports' ambition aims for all initiatives to do better.

Ports are looking forward to seeing the Government's forthcoming update to the Maritime 2050 strategy which we hope will provide clear guidance on the future. While ports have grasped the initiative, at present not all ports have the resources to fulfil its aims, or specifically look at Scope 3 emissions.

Shipping and ports are responsible for 3% of emissions, but 95% of all trade globally – an impressive ratio by any standard. Ships and ports emit fewer grams of CO2 per tonne than any other mode of freight transport

Figure A3.3: Emissions of maritime vs other transport modes (IMO, 2009).



(see Figure A3.3). By comparison, aircraft emit 435 grams of CO2 per kilometre, for a 40-tonne truck it's 80 grams, a train emits 49 grams, but a bulk carrier shipping general cargo emits just 2½ grams per kilometre.

The figures are impressive, but we know as ports we can do more, and we have a duty to do so to our staff and the cities where we are located. One opportunity for improvement is shore power, cold ironing, where grid capacity allows. This is where a ship can plug in when alongside to run hotel services, rather than burning fuel to run generators. This would also reduce the noise pollution that can occur in port cities. Tackling this would require collaboration between numerous stakeholders with backing from the Government to incentivise ships to use such services.

Using Cattewater port as an example to illustrate the benefits of short sea shipping, we handle about two million tonnes of cargo annually in and out of Plymouth as a gateway to the South West. Transporting that tonnage by road instead would require 54,000 lorry trips coming into the city from the southeast on 300-mile journeys, instead of delivery journeys of 8-12 miles on average at the end of the supply chain.

Businesses are knocking on our door daily, asking if we can facilitate the cargo containers they use rather than having them transported from the east to Plymouth. We're looking at the Scope 3 emissions from shipping while large businesses are looking at their own and their supply chains' Scope 3 emissions, and are desperate to receive goods via the cleanest and reliable method possible – which is through the port closest to their operations, whether in the form of bulk cargoes or, more often than not, via containerised cargo.

In recent times maritime, particularly outside the major ports, has been overlooked, and as a result the local community and the local authority may not always be able to see or fully understand the importance of ports and harbours to the city.

Plymouth is a proud port city. We have ambitions to accommodate and respond to future trends, which are likely to include larger ships, reduced focus on leisure, transition to future fuels and supporting renewables, both offshore and in the harbour. The latter is a key growth area, which provides a huge opportunity not only to ports and coastal communities, but also to the nation, as we strive to maintain our own energy security.

Ports are therefore central to pulling the nation into the future, but we need support from our local authorities in terms of funding, planning and regulation – recognising the risks we have in the joint local plan. Space

in port cities is at a premium. Over the years, the demand for seaside living has grown and this has squeezed the port space that will be vital to enable the larger, cleaner ships of the future, with lay-down space for increased cargoes and renewable equipment. The problems we face – space, infrastructure, shore power capacity, larger vessels – are clear, but the demand for housing also continually grows. Ports do generally have space, but the areas around ports are critical to providing the jobs, the opportunities and the skills for the next generation of personnel in the maritime industry who need to be housed in a suitable location. It's important to protect the long-term benefits of ports for the local area and avoid short-term wins for housing in inappropriate areas.

4 ARTS AND CULTURE

Thea Behrman

Thea Behrman is Artistic Director and CEO of Estuary Festival, a programme of curated arts and culture co-created and delivered in partnership with the communities in the Thames Estuary in South Essex and North Kent.

Next to the DPS World London Gateway – a part of the Port of London that is linked to 51 countries – are some sites of special scientific interest, where over the last few years Estuary Festival has undertaken projects with coastal communities to address some of the challenges they face.

Our experience chimes with Judah Armani's comment that the edges bring out interesting narratives in people. This has inspired our efforts to shine a spotlight on the Thames Estuary with high-quality, ambitious contemporary arts programmes. What is particular about our work is that it is all about celebrating the stories, places and people in these coastal communities. This is where industry is right next to natural spaces, and where we have communities facing multiple challenges. How can we draw out a relevant and meaningful programme, as a response to the challenges that have been identified?

Estuary Festival embraces the South Essex and North Kent coastlines and extends into London as well. It's about forming links with communities that have much in common, and yet are also divided by this body of water which has historically connected them together.

Estuary Festival began in 2016, and we are currently preparing for the third edition of the festival, which takes place in 2025. The work we have done so far demonstrates how we collaborate with communities and artists to explore their stories.

View across the Thames Estuary to the DP World London Gateway in Thurrock. Photo: Jonathan Juniper

This bird hide is in a far from idyllic location – a former waste facility that's been given over to nature. The artwork explores local people's stories about their connections with waste in the estuary. It is not just an artwork but a site of active research – a focus for speaking with people whose relatives have worked on these waste sites, and giving those conversations an opportunity to move forward.

Andy Freeman and Samantha Penn's Out to Dry explores how microfibres make their way from our clothing into the waterways. It asks questions about how our lives are intertwined with these bodies of water, when we are in our homes and seemingly disconnected. We are connected through those fibres. These are conversations we're having with diverse groups outside a conventional art gallery setting, right there on the estuary itself.

The People of 1381 is a project that received funding from the Arts & Humanities Research Council to create an archive documenting people who were involved in the Peasants' Revolt, one of the largest uprisings of the medieval period. The Thames Estuary was the epicentre of this rebellion, and our outdoor exhibition tells the story of how local people from this area came to rebel. We looked at the contemporary resonance those stories have, and at similar challenges people still face today, particularly around climate justice, access to land and workers' rights. The exhibition is still there, so it has a life beyond the festival.

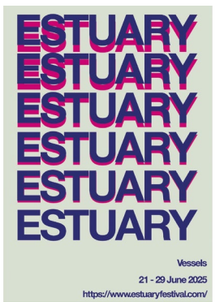
The artist Ruth Ewan created *Mirrors for Princes*, a series of mirrors which were installed in five local pubs, including The World's End in Tilbury, to create conversations around these topics in unusual settings.

Since the 2021 festival we have been developing activities with diverse groups of people. On a walk with students, maritime workers, deaf and disabled participants on Canvey Wick, we explored what people need in their lives today. What came back resoundingly was that they need something that tells their stories, something that gives them a sense of hope. When they can engage in fun things to do, it addresses some of those challenges and health inequalities as well.

We've reconnected people with the intertidal zones. A 'Mudwalk' led by our resident artist and researcher Gero Gnecchi explored challenges in our coastal communities such as having to raise the sea walls due to increased flood risks. People are disconnected from their coastal environment, yet we can learn so much from it.

Another theme that comes through strongly is around intergenerational knowledge and the energy that's held by some of the older people in the community. There is something about tidal places that's ever inspiring for artists and creatives, and that should be open to everybody. It should not be locked down to a few people. We are trying to find different ways to share that knowledge and widen that engagement.

This Is Us is a joint project between Estuary Festival and Metal commissioned by Castle Point Borough Council, which is in the process of developing a new local plan. The Council realised that the usual consultation process doesn't do much to draw out people's perspectives of their place, or their ideas of what it could be like in future. There have been some great outcomes from this project, with people accessing places they wouldn't normally go and sharing their experiences, and this is informing the kind of place Castlepoint could become.

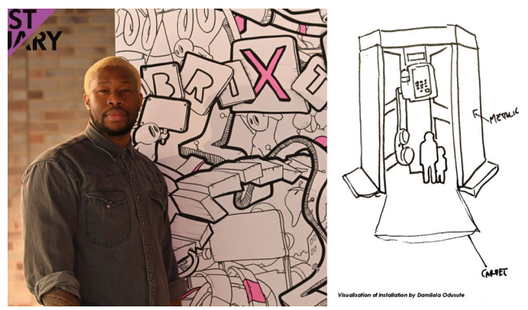


The theme of our next festival, in June 2025, is *Vessels*, by which we mean not just the boats and ships in the ports and the estuary, but the people themselves as holders of stories and knowledge, and how that can be shared. We're planning journeys across the estuary and projects around climate, and exploring different ways of engaging with that. Our Estuary 2025 poster, designed by a student at a local college, is an example of how we are connecting students and young people with skills and the creative industries. The festival is a pathway for activating and finding those connections to industry.

Estuary Festival was recently awarded a Place Partnership grant by Arts Council England, enabling us to extend and develop our work. More than just a festival, Estuary is putting in place different ways of working, creating new partnerships to address the challenges in our places, and evaluating how what we do can inform sustainable futures for local communities.

We are planning boat journeys with the artists group Platform to the wind farm off the estuary to form deeper connections with wind energy, linked with a publication and a series of events to share knowledge about wind energy.

We are working with the historic Thames barge Raybel, which has recently been restored and will be making its first journey from Sittingbourne in Kent across the estuary to Benfleet in Essex. We will be convening conversations about climate and trade through the creative activities on board.



We are working with the internationally renowned artist Damilola Odusute, who is of Nigerian descent and grew up in the estuary, where he was fostered by a gypsy Roma family. Damilola's installation tells the story of

how he made his way into a successful career as an artist from a very challenging start in life. He will visit the schools he attended in the estuary to tell his story and draw out the students' positive hopes for the future. The installation will take the form of a super-sized phonebooth with Damilola's murals inside and incorporating the stories of local young people.

The artist duo Breakwater – Taey Iohe and Youngsook Choi – explore ideas around climate change from a migrants' perspective. They are developing a work that draws out people's knowledge of their place on the estuary, highlighting that it's not just climate experts who know about estuary places. Local people of all ages and from different walks of life have a special knowledge about these places that can be shared and celebrated.

Hadleigh Farm Estate is creating one of the UK's largest rewilding areas, turning 240 hectares of land just beneath Hadleigh Castle over to large-scale habitat creation. We are creating a new pavilion space there for engaging with the topics that raises – biodiversity, permaculture, climate change.

SILT is an incredible work in a tidal pool on Canvey Island by the artist duo Arbonauts, who are bringing together students and young people to create work as the tide is going out.

Activities by our resident artist Nwando Ebizie include organising a sound walk drawing people to the water's edge.

Estuary is also involved in Arise, which is part of the UKRI Resilient UK Coastal Communities and Seas programme and brings together research partners around the country including members of the Key Cities Innovation Network. Estuary's work will feed into this programme, which is scheduled to run for five years.

5 THE BENEFITS OF BLUE

Elaine Hayes, FRSB

A former Chair of Seafish, the UK's public body supporting the seafood industry, and of the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority, conservationist Elaine Hayes has taken on the challenge of developing the UK's first National Marine Park at Plymouth Sound as its inaugural CEO.

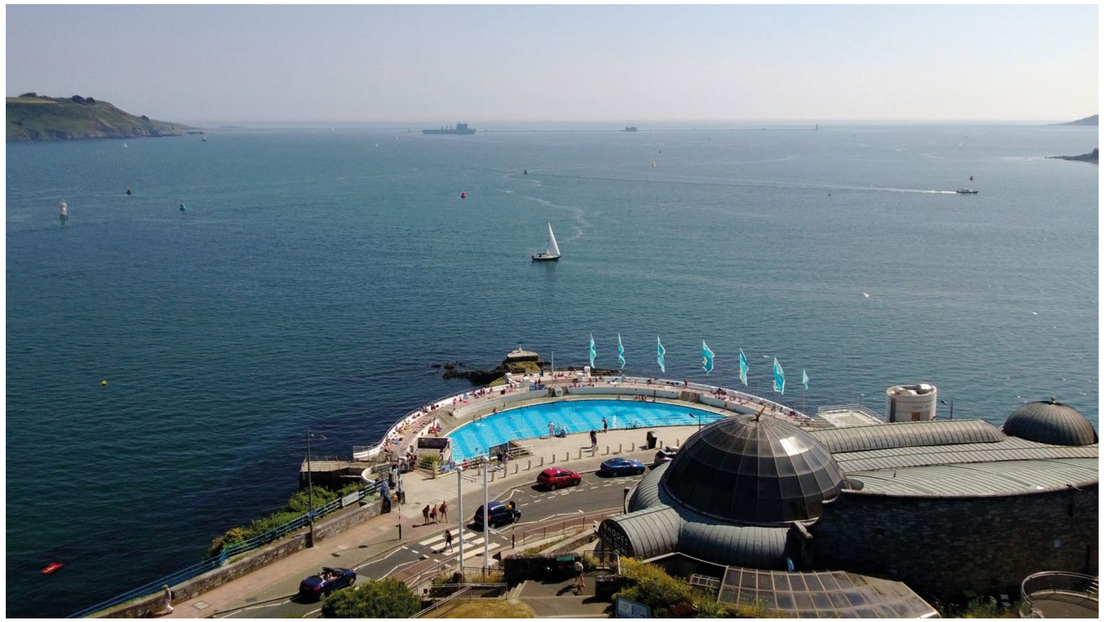
National Marine Parks are a new phenomenon and there are now quite a few in development – but what are they? Put simply, a National Marine Park is a National Park in the sea.

When the National Parks were created in the late 1940s, the sea was not an environment we really considered, and the National Parks stopped at low water. The blue bit is unknown and quite scary for many people.

In 2018, Plymouth City Council Leader Tudor Evans, Professor Martin Attrill from the University of Plymouth and Luke Pollard MP met to discuss the idea of creating a National Marine Park. Going down the legislative route, they knew, is a long, drawn-out and painful process, so they decided it would be better to declare rather than designate. This is how Plymouth came to declare the UK's first National Marine Park – and now, my job is to make sure it meets everybody's hopes and dreams.

The central point is that people need nature and nature needs people – so while National Marine Parks are for everyone, our coastal communities are key. We are all aware of the challenges we face around the loss of nature, not just in this country, but across the world. We understand that our communities are very disconnected from nature and the environment, and we also know we are living in one of the biggest health crises we have seen in this country. We need new and different ways to address that.

We started with a simple vision to bring people and planet together to realise a sustainable relationship with the sea. We talk about sustainability. Richard Allan's message about ports is important, because without economic drivers, people can't have good



jobs and then they can't even access the environment.

It's important that our communities have a sense of connection to the sea, but over time we have created a profound disconnect from their coastal environment. It is worth remembering that if you come from a coastal community, you have a lower-than-average life expectancy, you are likely to have lower educational attainment, you earn less money, and you have poorer physical and mental health. The data shows that lung diseases and mental health are more than 10% worse in coastal communities than they are in inland communities. You're more likely to be a drug user or have been subject to drug misuse.

Ironically, the Treasury Green Book (of investment criteria) works in 360 degrees, whereas coastal communities can only calculate for 180 degrees, which amounts to a massive inequity built into the funding mechanisms for coastal communities. This is a major challenge affecting their lived experience.

We are grateful that Plymouth Sound National Marine Park has received a large Heritage Horizons Award from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Over the last two and a half years I have gone out into communities and talked to 10,000 people in different venues and arenas to find out what is good for them – what works and what doesn't. What did we learn from that? We learned that many feel the sea is not for them and that they are fundamentally disconnected from it. They don't see people who go to the seaside as part of their tribe, so they're not keen to join them. They can't afford to buy swimming costumes for their kids, and even if they could, they can't afford wetsuits, so their kids can't play on the beach with any sense of parity with other children. So they don't go.

We learned they can't swim. The national curriculum provides swimming lessons, but kids don't learn to swim at school because there aren't enough lessons. And now we have three years of the Covid generation who've had no swimming lessons whatsoever, so none of them can swim. A lot of our work is to figure out how we can engage and support that.

"This deprivation is intergenerational. Communities are crying out for a way of working they have input into, that changes things for their kids and their grandkids."

Another challenge we face is that this deprivation is intergenerational. When it comes to literacy, parents with a reading age of under 11 are trying to help their kids to learn to read and that's really hard. Communities are crying out for a consistent way of working that they have input into, that changes things for them and their kids and their grandkids.

Coastal communities are at greater risk of displacement. Many local residents are on very low incomes and have a high need for benefit support. We just don't know why in coastal communities the outcomes are as bad as they are. Fundamentally, good places to live are good for people, so how can we overcome the disadvantages that exist?

We have a great opportunity with the Horizons programme to engage widely with exciting digital techniques, but first we have to think, who gets to see it? Data poverty is a significant problem. People may have devices, but when we want to share information to empower and support them, they don't have the data to access it and to understand what opportunities are available.

Mental health is a major issue in which swimming can play a positive part. Moreover, the limited evidence is that blue is five times more effective for mental health than green, so if we can reconnect people with their blue spaces, we can have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing.

How does this align with wider UK needs?

We are trying to raise ambition and support young people into new jobs and learning different skills. We are short of people in the workplace. How can we support people to improve their health so that they can return to work?

The wildlife crisis is horrendous and we need to do a lot more around Net Zero if we're going to get close to achieving our ambitions. There are many opportunities in terms of skills and generating that connection to the sea and the marine environment.

Where does the money come from to pay for these improvements? There are many ways in which we can shapeshift what we're doing. One of the great things about National Marine Parks is that they are being built on a permissive model, so it's a grassroots movement for change. We now have a dozen geographies around the UK coastline in the process of developing these ideas.

What will success look like?

We've commissioned a State of the Sound Report, which looks at the data that's already been collected to inform decision-making and help us to see where the gaps are, so we understand what to do next to make a difference.

The existing model has not worked for communities, so we are trying to do things differently. We've done a pilot project with the Barbican Theatre in Plymouth to engage with our refugee communities and with people for whom English is a second language, by taking them onto the river and talking to them about it.

We need to continue innovating and not be afraid to make mistakes, but use the mistakes we make as building blocks for going forward and going faster.

That means we must challenge conventional narratives as well. How can we go further and faster? Legislation can be a blocker, rather than supporting our ability to deliver.

We think National Marine Parks are a model that can bring about change and we are excited to work with others to reconnect people with their environment.

6 STAKEHOLDER COOPERATION IN PORT CITIES

Dr Toby Roberts, Jennifer Knight, Prof. William Powrie

Dr Toby Roberts and Prof. William Powrie are members of the Infrastructure group in the Faculty of Engineering & Physical Sciences, Jennifer Knight manages the Infrastructure for Port Cities and Coastal Towns Network (iPACT), all at the University of Southampton, a member of the Key Cities Innovation Network.

Port-cities have a key role in international trade and provide essential services to the local, regional and national economies. They create a range of economic benefits and provide services modern society relies upon. In addition to this, ports have also played an important role in the social fabric of port-cities, and port-cities have developed throughout history with the port at the centre of a city's identity.

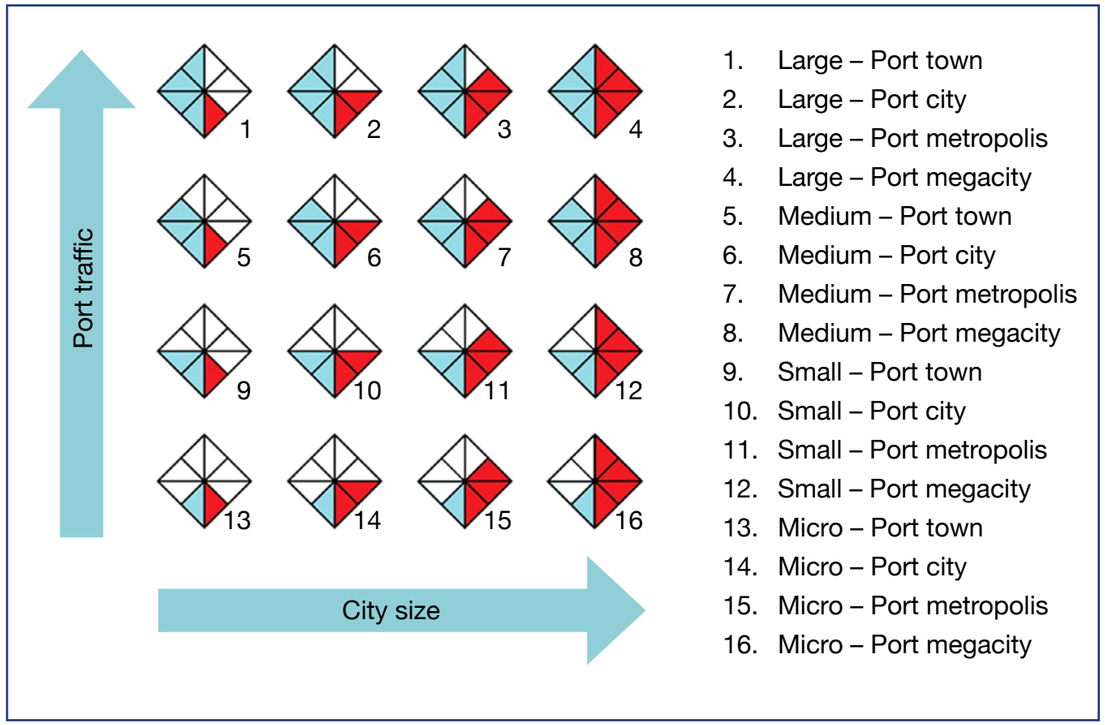
This is clearly illustrated by an example like Liverpool, where the culture, local food, accent and political identity have all been shaped by the city's maritime heritage (Mah, 2014). Ports have considerable potential to provide a range of benefits locally as well as nationally, however, this is increasingly not the case.

Ports are sources of considerable negative impacts, such as traffic congestion, visual blight and community severance (Chen and Lam, 2018). Ports can create varying forms of environmental pollution, such as air, water, noise, light, soil, thermal and biological pollution (e.g. alien invasive species). The historical benefits of close proximity of the port to the city have disappeared, and instead this proximity has become a source of problems. Alongside growing environmental concerns, decreasing port employment, automation, mechanisation, increasing security concerns and decreasing public access have reduced the role of the port in the lives of many port-city residents, cutting the port off from the city and reducing the port to a source of problems, rather than being a source of local pride and identity. The economic benefits of ports have also become increasingly widely spread, with over 90% occurring outside the port area (OECD 2013), whilst port employment has fallen dramatically. Within the UK context, coastal areas are also often areas of deprivation that experience lower qualities of life (Asthana and Gibson, 2022) and are set to face significant consequences as a result of climate change. A transition to a circular economy may also pose challenges to ports that are reliant on fossil fuels or raw materials that may see a reduction in demand in the future (Bergqvist and Monios, 2019). Port-cities are therefore faced with an uncertain future.

Port-city residents are increasingly separated and disconnected from the port and its benefits; however, local residents still have to face a port's negative externalities on a daily basis. This process of decreasing local benefits of ports and declining local support has been termed demaritimisation (Musso and Ghiara, 2011). If future port-city development is to be sustainable, it should seek to restore this relationship to its full potential, allowing the residents to gain more significant benefits from the port's presence. The reversal of this process can be achieved by working towards what has been called the societal license to operate (SLO) (Moeremans and Dooms, 2021). The SLO is defined as "fulfilling the expectations of stakeholders and local communities in dimensions that go beyond the creation of wealth" (Pages Sanchez, 2016). One way for ports to achieve this is to increase the so-called "soft values" they create. Soft values are the non-socioeconomic values, such as cultural, sociological, artistic and historical functions provided by seaports. This has been highlighted by the European Sea Ports Organisation, which ranks improving relationships with the local community as number 7 in the top 10 priorities for European ports (ESPO, 2023). In addition to this, the transition to Net Zero also offers an opportunity to restore local benefits, by providing jobs, improving the environment and providing a new purpose for ports and coastal communities. Port-cities are ideally placed to lead the transition towards sustainability. They are ideally suited to implement the circular economy due to being hotbeds of industry and raw materials, and they are well placed to embrace renewable energy opportunities such as offshore wind, and many have existing infrastructure that can be repurposed for new industries, such as the hydrogen economy, as well as having considerable potential to develop culture and tourism related activities connected to their maritime heritage. Port-cities are therefore ideal locations to implement sustainable development.

Addressing the challenges faced by port-cities is often complicated by a disconnect between port and city authorities, creating a lack of cooperation, separate masterplans, and obstacles to sustainability. Issues such as air quality, transportation planning, renewable energy and the circular economy require cooperation between a range of stakeholders, however at present this cooperation is insufficient and plans are often made in isolation. Roberts (2024) highlighted a key issue, which is a growing lack of awareness and cooperation between port and city authorities in relation to sustainability, with city authorities often lacking awareness of the port's social and environmental initiatives, and both port and city authorities working towards separate targets for renewable energy and the transition to Net Zero and struggling to overcome the financial barriers involved.

Figure A6.1: The Southampton System of port-city classification (Roberts et al, 2021).



Medium port-cities as defined by the Southampton System (see Figure A6.1) are globally the most likely to report poor relationships between stakeholders, and also have the lowest levels of adoption of measures to reduce environmental impact and improve local attitudes towards the port (Roberts, 2024). This size grouping includes many UK port-cities, such as Southampton, Belfast and Liverpool. This could be for a variety of reasons, such as the fact this size grouping is most likely to contain ports located close to the city centre, as well as being large enough to experience considerable negatives, without the financial resources to address them easily.

This is especially challenging in port-cities with privatised ports, as is common in the UK. This ownership model makes cooperation more challenging, and in many cases relationships between port and city authorities are strained by areas of tension, such as perceived interference by the city authority in the port's operations, resulting in port and city authorities not working together to address key issues. To address this, improving mutually beneficial cooperation between port and city stakeholders as equal partners has been proposed as a strategy for port-cities of the future (Roberts, 2024). Changing port ownership models may be politically unfeasible, however, there are ways to increase cooperation within the existing ownership structures by focusing on issues that both authorities are already working towards and/or benefit from, such as increasing renewable energy, and improving local attitudes towards the port. One approach to this is for a third party, such as a university or consultancy, to host an annual port-city forum, bringing stakeholders together on an equal footing.

Approach

To address this, the first annual port-city forum was hosted in Southampton on July 2, 2024. This event included representatives from Associated British Ports (ABP), DP World, Solent Stevedores, Carnival Cruises, Southampton City Council, Solent Forum, Red Funnel, Go South Coast Ltd, Southampton Marine and Maritime Institute, Meachers Global Logistics, South Western Railway, Old Town Community Forum, Ridge and Partners, Channel Coastal observatory, AGS Airports, EBP South, Southampton Voluntary Services and Solent Partners, and was hosted by The University of Southampton. This event was semi-structured, with opening talks from the University, ABP and Southampton City council, followed by group discussions designed to identify common themes suitable for collaboration. Questionnaires were distributed to participants before and after the event.

Results

Before the event, all stakeholders felt the event was needed (63% very needed, 37% needed), and the pre-event survey identified transport, energy, environment, skills, training, and financing as key areas requiring cooperation. Participants also reported a lack of cooperation, difficulty speaking with other stakeholders, difficulty engaging with the city council, a lack of leadership and a lack of shared common goals as key barriers to cooperation.

After the event, all attendees felt the event was useful for them (73% useful and 27% very useful) and relationships between stakeholders improved according to survey responses. All respondents also agreed that continuing the forum would be useful (27% moderately useful, 55% very useful, 18% extremely useful). Repeating the forum on an annual basis was the preferred option (55%), followed by every 6 months (27%). To make future events more successful, participants also requested a greater amount of time for networking, creation of joint targets and commitments and better inclusion of the artistic and creative sectors.

The port-city forum also created numerous outputs. The university has developed several student projects with stakeholders, investigating issues such as creating flood defences that are better for local communities, finding ways to better connect the city with its waterfront and work developing a maritime heritage trail. These projects have received input from stakeholders such as ABP and Southampton City Council. ABP has also given talks to local community groups following on from the forum. To further develop the social benefits created by the port, discussions during the forum identified the need for a festival or event celebrating Southampton's maritime heritage. Further discussions between the University and Southampton National Park city group has also led to collaboration on creating a festival celebrating the city's blue and green spaces in 2026.

Conclusion and recommendations

Southampton's first port-city forum has highlighted a potential approach for increasing stakeholder collaboration, and the potential benefits of this. At present, the benefits are modest but provide a solid foundation on which to make progress on an incremental basis each year. The stakeholders have confirmed their interest in continuing the forum and have highlighted its usefulness to them at this early stage.

The port-city forum concept helps overcome some of the challenges faced by port-cities, particularly those with privatised port ownership, and demonstrates that if stakeholders engage with each other, areas of cooperation can emerge. Other port-cities and coastal towns should consider introducing an annual forum to collaboratively address issues relating to sustainability.

The port-city forum concept has considerable potential to assist in enabling collaboration towards sustainable development, helping to overcome the barriers created by a lack of cooperation and a lack of leadership. Further work should be undertaken to identify ways to more effectively translate areas of shared interest such as renewable energy and the circular economy into firm plans for collaboration.

About Key Cities

Key Cities is a cross-party national network of 24 cities and towns across England and Wales that represents the diversity of urban living in the UK.

Our members are home to some 12% of the UK's urban population outside London, contributing over £150 billion a year to the UK economy with some of the fastest-growing local economies in the country.

We are a united voice for urban Britain, working to champion our places to unlock devolution, deliver prosperity, protect the environment and deliver innovative solutions for the challenges we face.

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ISBN 978-0-9934156-7-8